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OCTOBER 1923

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

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Clarence Herbert New Courtney Ryley Cooper H. Bedford-Jones and others

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The Red Book Magazine

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Aeolian Building **New York City**

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By J. E. Greenslade

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THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor

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COVER DESIGN: Painted by Laurence Herndon to illustrate "The Trail to Bitter Gulch."

Two Attractive Novelettes

The Trail to Bitter Gulch By William O. Grenolds 49

The author of the popular "Tales of an Honest Grafter" here contributes a vivid and deeply interesting story of the modern West.

Brome's Luck By H. Bedford-Jones 174

Adventure pursues adventure in this swift-paced story of an American's exploits on the Indo-China coast—by the author of "One Night in Tarakan" and many other Blue Book Magazine successes.

Thirteen Specially Good Short Stories

Deep Water Men By Culpeper Zandtt 1

The first of a fine new group dealing with the exploits of certain venturesome sailors of fortune on the Pacific—written by a man who well knows the sea and the ways of the men who brave it.

Rex Takes Them Out By Austin Hall 15

Here we have a most engaging story of the mountains, and of a sheep-dog whose acquaintance you will be glad indeed to make.

Mrs. Opalsen's Pearls By Agatha Christie 23

A new exploit of that keen detective Hercule Poirot, told in a way to keep you interested—and guessing—from beginning to end.

Where Violets Grew By Elmer Brown Mason 31

A quaint and most delightful story wherein golf and human nature and sundry other strange things are amusingly mingled.

Fatima and the Germanees By Wm. Ashley Anderson 40

A saga of war and desperate hazard in African jungle and desert, written with authority and a fine sense of the dramatic.

Free Lances in Diplomacy By Clarence Herbert New 65

"The Oriental Menace" has to do with a daring scheme to circumvent a Russo-Japanese-German coalition, and is one of the most exciting of all Mr. New's memorable stories.

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MAGAZINE

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1923

DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

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The Home Immigrant By George L. Knapp 78

The experiences of a Southern mountain boy in a great city make a conspicuously worth-while story as narrated by the talented author of "The Lobster List" and "Poetic Injustice."

The Buried Alive Club By Frank Parker Stockbridge 120

"False Lights" describes a curious smuggling scheme and the way it was beaten by a unique organization of Government men.

The Roof Bungalow By Harold H. Armstrong 131

Like many another who has ventured to assist a lady in distress, the hero of this absorbing story found himself in variegated trouble.

The Antelope Kriss By Warren H. Miller 138

A long journey through little known regions of the Far East recently provided Mr. Miller with a number of stories that are distinctly unusual; this is one of the best of them.

Lilies of the Lord By Meigs O. Frost 147

The author of "Cap'n Didier Stands Pat," "Politics Is Politics" and other delightful tales of the Louisiana South Coast country here offers another little drama typical of the region.

Every Man a King By Lawrence H. Conrad 160

A new writer has in this striking story of the steel-workers achieved a note in fiction which we are confident will please you.

Big Eye By Joe Mills 170

The battle to the death between a great bighorn ram and an aged puma forms the stirring climax of this vivid story.

A Noteworthy Serial

The Last Frontier By Courtney Ryley Cooper 90

Buffalo Bill, General Custer and other noted figures play prominent parts in this vivid narrative of our West when it was wild, by the author of "The Wildcatters" and "The White Desert."

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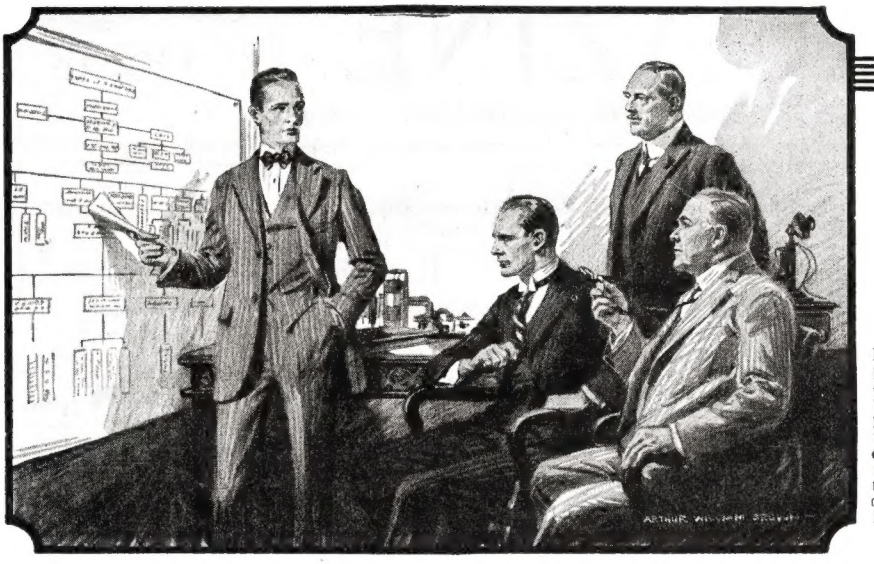

Modern Corporations prefer to recruit the executive staff from the ranks wherever possible. "Given two men of equal experience, the trained man is the man to promote," said the President of one $20,000,000 industry.

Have they got you safely tagged?

AGAIN AND AGAIN, in directors' rooms, this conversation is heard:

FIRST DIRECTOR: "I wonder whether the man we are looking for isn't in our own organization? How about Madison?"

SECOND DIRECTOR: "I don't see how we could consider him. He is just a salesman" or "He is just an accountant" or "He is just an engineer."

So Madison, who has made a creditable record, is passed over in favor of someone from the outside. His job has tagged him and pigeonholed him. He has done the work well for which his superiors employed him but they think of him as a fixture in that work.

A man who refused to be tagged

One of the outstanding young business men of the Pacific Coast is John W. Sparling of Seattle. He is senior partner in the firm of Sparling and Clark; manager of Pacific Ports, Inc.; and he is chairman of the State Board of Accountancy; yet he has not passed his thirtieth birthday.

How does a man reach such a position of responsibility and profit at so early an age? He began in the accounting department of a large company, and might easily have continued to be hidden there for the rest of his business life. But looking around him he saw the tags being tied constantly and more firmly onto men; he saw the danger of letting it be said, "Sparling is a good accountant, but he's just an accountant." He determined to do something while he still had youth and energy to keep himself from being tagged.

The "something" consisted in

Sending for "Forging Ahead in Business"

In the pages of "Forging Ahead in Business," a booklet published and distributed by the Alexander Hamilton Institute, Mr. Sparling read the story of the Modern Business Course and Service. He made a decision then, and three years later, he wrote this letter:

"It has been on my mind for some time to write and express to you my sincere appreciation of the assistance and inspiration your Service has been to me in the past few years.

"When I enrolled for the Modern Business Course and Service I had been specializing for some time in accounting. The deeper I got into it the more I realized the danger of specializing too much. I could feel that I was creating a limitation for myself. . . . I realized that to make a really large success in business I must be able to *read the story back of all the figures* that were to come under my supervision, and not be content to be merely a good compiler of figures. . . ."

The executive wears no tag

The Alexander Hamilton Institute gave him the thing he needed. It did not make him a salesman, but it gave him the fundamentals of merchandising and sales management; it did not make him a factory superintendent or office manager, but it taught him the essentials of factory and office control; it did not make him a banker, but it gave him the outstanding principles of corporation finance. In a word, it fitted him to be an executive—to employ specialists and direct them.

That is the service of the Alexander Hamilton Institute in a nutshell. It takes the man who is in danger of being tagged as "only a salesman" or "only an engineer" and provides him with a working knowledge of every other department of business. Such information makes itself apparent in every talk between a man and his superiors; it is the one certain means of attracting notice and inviting promotion.

Send for the book he sent for

The Alexander Hamilton Institute offers to every thoughtful man a copy of the book which kept Mr. Sparling from being tagged as "only a salesman." The book is never sold; it is sent gladly to any man who will give it an hour of his time.

For your convenience a coupon is attached. Fill it in and the book will be mailed immediately, without obligation to you.

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 37 OCTOBER 1923 No. 6

Deep Water Men

The first of a fine new series wherein life on the Pacific moves at 1923 speed. Mr. Zandtt has sailed five times around the world—knows the sea and ships—and men.

By CULPEPER ZANDTT

THIS chronicle properly begins about the time of the March typhoon in the China Sea. Two evenings before, when the glass had as yet given no indication of a sudden drop, Captain Joe Allen came into the little mess-saloon at the end of the first dog-watch, tossing his cap upon the transom, and sat down at the head of the table. The starboard watch had the deck—which gave him as dinner companions Tom Harvey, the chief engineer, and young Bradford, still in his apprenticeship as second mate. On alternate nights the party would consist of Bill Yardley, the mate—a grumpy Scotch-border man of forty; young George Bass, the third mate; and Burton Mandeville, the assistant engineer. There were times—when a long voyage gave passage-money a chance to help out on the coal-bills, and one or more of the extra staterooms were occupied—when the remaining seats at the table were filled with dinner-companions who usually had more to offer in exchange of ideas than a morose individual of Bill Yardley's temperament, or the juniors whose training during apprenticeship required more or less silent deference to the master under whom they were sailing.

Tom Harvey was the most nearly congenial of the lot, in Captain Joe's estimation. In the first place Tom was a fellow-American in a crew of otherwise alien nationalities. He had the same brand of resource and cool nerve—like the shipmaster, he didn't give a darn for any other man's assumed superiority. What Tom felt like saying to anybody, he *said*—as the spirit moved him, and his sheer competency frequently caused some remarks to be over-

looked when they were a little too obviously to the point. Allen liked the two apprentices also; both were decent boys of good London families, anxious to please and make good in their chosen profession. Both were surprisingly good navigators, though under twenty-one; and though without a great deal of imagination, they were sufficiently well-read and well-bred to hold up their end of a conversation when the Captain felt like drawing them out.

After dinner Allen suggested that the Chief come up to his cabin, abaft the wheelhouse, for a pipe or two, after going below to see if his second assistant had anything to report as needing immediate attention. (Harvey let his two assistants feel that responsibility was squarely on their shoulders when on duty—but he liked to know pretty well how matters were going in the engine-room and stokehold before staying on deck for any length of time.)

THE master's cabin had an atmosphere peculiar to the man himself—differing noticeably from the living-quarters of other shipmasters in the cargo-service. Neatly framed along the bulkheads there were several of the best colored prints. In one corner there was a phonograph which Allen had selected from hundreds of others for its rich "tone-color" quality—and a collection of four hundred records. Securely bolted to a drop-lid in his transom-desk was a first-class typewriter, and on the rear bulkhead the instruments of a high-powered radio installation with auxiliary telephone-equipment which the Captain had put in at his own expense. Harvey considered this a rather too progressive form of extravagance—and said so, when he came up to the bridge-deck. The Captain merely laughed at this—pushing a spare head-frame along the transom within his reach.

"Put that on for a few minutes, Tom, while I tune up to the wave the 'P & O' are using for their phone-messages! You probably overlooked the paragraphs in the last papers we had coming out of Frisco—stating that the telephone companies would be ready in a few months to connect any house-telephone, ashore, with any steamer at sea within a certain radius. Experimentally they'll accommodate most anybody right now! The limit of communication is only temporary, of course—because we have three stations in the United States which now talk Morse or Continental to any point on the earth's surface. Transmitting the human voice over the same distance is merely a step further in perfecting the amplifiers. As a matter of fact, I was talking with San Francisco just before dinner—over six thousand sea miles from here—and got the girl in the Frisco central just about as distinctly as I would on the average shore-line. She offered to connect me with any house-telephone in Frisco, Berkeley or Oakland, but I was getting kinda hungry—told her I'd try that later. Commercial telephone service for most anywhere in a seven-thousand-mile radius will start before we realize that it's possible. As I understand it, the companies will connect any house-telephone, ashore, with any ship at sea upon request—but of course the tolls will prevent their being swamped with promiscuous talking."

"They *will* be swamped, though! There's a limit to everything—particularly to the number of wave-lengths which can be used simultaneously."

"W-e-e-l—they *said* that, you know, when radio first came into use at sea, and subsequently when they began to substitute it for wires ashore. Yet there's a perfectly stupendous amount of talking going through the air every second of the day. Some way, somehow, they're going to overcome that difficulty—isolate each conversation as completely as they do in the wire system ashore. I'm not enough of an electrical engineer to explain how, but they must have gotten pretty well along in that line or they wouldn't come out with the statement that they are practically ready for business.

"Gee! It beats the devil what's being done, these days—doesn't it! When I made my first voyage as greaser in the engine-room of the old *Allianca,* nobody'd ever dreamed of radio—far's I know. If we got in trouble, we used the good old international flag-code to any passing boat—or else had to make the best of it without any help at all. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred we made port *somehow.* If we didn't, the maritime exchanges put us on the Missing List. Sometimes a boat turned up with survivors in a month or so—sometimes the Missing List told the whole story. But nowadays—shucks! You can't stick a head-frame over your ears through one watch without gettin' a yelp from somebody—with troubles all the way from a deflected compass to su'thin' that'll put 'em under water in two or three

hours. Even when *that* happens, you know exactly where to pick up their boats when you come along."

"Unless everybody in that neighborhood happens to hit something that makes picking up boats temporarily out of the question! Then somebody goes to Davy Jones in spite of radio or any other modern invention. Quite a bunch of somebodies—if it's bad enough! Do you know, Tom, I don't get jumpy even when my digestion's a little out, any more'n you do. But there's something in the air tonight that I don't quite like! Glass isn't doing a thing—yet. I figgered on saving mebbe fifty or sixty ton of coal by running just inside the Macclesfield Bank and keeping west of those small atolls all the way down to Singapore. But if anything comes up suddenly, I'm heading a little closer than I like to be toward the Macclesfield. Mebbe it's only a fool hunch—but I think I'll play safe and spend a little extra coal! We're pretty well down to her Plimsoll with heavy-case machinery; if anything starts to fetch loose, I want elbow-room —not a bunch of reefs on my lee!"

Stepping to a door which opened into the wheelhouse, he spoke to the man on duty.

"Shove her over due sou'east and keep her there a few hours, Grimes!"

"Sou'eas' it is, sir!"

THE engineer had been smoking thoughtfully, in his armchair by the desk—and now stepped out upon the bridge for a moment's sniff at the weather. It was a clear starlight night—warm and pleasant, not a breeze stirring, the sea oily—too still, if anything. Young Bradford was up at the starboard end, casting a wary eye, occasionally, along the horizon-line ahead of them, but with his thoughts ashore in a certain London drawing-room. When the Chief stepped back into Allen's cabin, the Captain had just put a fine record of the *entr'acte* orchestration from "Madame Butterfly" on the phonograph, but didn't seem to be as absorbed in it as he usually was in really big music. Harvey shut the door and resumed his chair.

"Mebbe that hunch of yours isn't so far out, Cap'n—though the weather's as slick as dancin'-school! I been feeling all the afternoon as if we were due to meet up with *something*—but I haven't the faintest idea *what*. Mebbe it's because I'm wonderin' a little about some of the crew. Bill Yardley's grumpy as the devil—mebbe he was born that way; but as I size him up, he's never sailed with a Canadian or British crew under a Yankee master before, and it doesn't set right with him. How did old Jennings happen to put her under Canadian colors, anyhow—sell out all his int'rest in her? You started to explain, but something headed you off."

"Why—I guess I'm as much responsible for that as anybody. Cap'n Jennings and the rest of the Company have been losing money on these three good boats for the last couple of years—I knew this would be the last voyage of the *Wyanomah.* They'd have laid her up indefinitely. So I told Jennings I wouldn't take her out again. This 'last voyage' idea was too discouraging—knowing you're just bucking against dead wood in spite of anything you can do! Well, some one told Jennings it would be money in his pocket if he offered me a couple of thousand to put her on some reef where she'd pound to bits. But neither of us would have done it—too much risk of getting in Dutch with the underwriters. I couldn't afford to dirty my ticket—have that marked up against my reputation as a master. I asked him why he didn't sell a few shares in her to some of his Vancouver friends and put her under Canadian registry—said I was perfectly willing to take her out if he did. He thought you wouldn't care to go with me—at the lower wages. But I told him you'd rather keep a steady job at a little less money than hunt a berth in some other losing proposition that couldn't last after the next voyage. A ship which can't come any nearer earning her own living in open competition with foreign bottoms on deep-water than a forty-per-cent loss, each voyage, simply hasn't any business out there! That's all there is to it! It's not a question of patriotism, but of cold economic fact! A ship-subsidy merely shifts the loss from the owners to the whole people in more burdensome taxation. Well, Jennings and his partners made the deal quicker than I thought they would—for all three boats—and they weren't long in fixing cargoes that'll pay a good living profit under the changed conditions. Just what the deal was, I don't know—beyond an impression that Jennings still owns the controlling interest and has the final say about each boat. What was it you were thinking about Yardley and some of the crew?"

"Why—far as the mate's concerned, I guess it's nothin' more'n chronic dislike for taking orders from a Yankee master. He's a good seaman and navigator, I'd say. That assistant of mine is a bird of another color. Good engineer—a little too well educated for the job. Knows enough to hold down a good paying berth ashore, with some big manufacturing concern—yet he's sailing as first on a cargo-boat and hasn't said anything about throwing up the job. Respectful enough—but always kinda half grinning, with a damned superior air about him. Got a lot of socialist notions that are dangerous if you carry 'em far enough. Caught him once or twice smoking with one of the deckhands up on the fo'c'stle-head. Kinda hinted that it wa'n't considered good form, even on a cargo-boat—but he only grinned to himself and didn't say he would or he wouldn't in future. Man he was talking with seems to be another of the same class—too well educated to be in the fo'c'stle unless he was shanghaied aboard—which he certainly *wasn't*. Once in a while you get an ex-battle-wagon man up for'ard who's been through high school or its equivalent in the Navy—he's a mighty valuable man to have aboard, because he knows his place yet can think in an emergency. But this Peavey bird is a good deal like Mandeville—a little more radical if anything. Both of 'em the sort you kinda get to watchin' without knowin' you're doing it!"

"Well—that comes pretty near being the way *I* sized 'em up, Tom. I don't like either one—and I'll say a few things to the agent who shipped 'em in Vancouver when I get back there! What do you think of our two apprentice-boys?"

"Clean, sound young fellows—both of them! Those marine schools over there usually get the pick of the younger sons—boys figuring on good berths in the big exporting houses later on, when they know the practical end of the ocean freight and passenger business. They work up to a master's ticket in the cargo-service—then go first or second officer on a P & O or Union-Castle for a while. After that they're ready for the counting-room ashore, and go right on up the ladder. You find 'em out here as managers of the branches in Hongkong or Singapore. Charley Wang seems a pretty decent Chink, too. Far as I can judge, he likes you an' me quite a lot. I've noticed you always have a mighty decent manner with every breed of Orientals. But he's got no use for Yardley or Mandeville or Peavey! What interests me even more about Charley is that he seems to be a *tong* man with considerable authority among my stokers. I see 'em sneakin' up to the galley, occasionally, to have him settle some dispute between them. Twice, he's stopped what might have been a pretty nasty fight with knives, when they got him below in a hurry."

"And don't forget his cooking, Tom! He only bosses it while acting as steward—but he makes those Chinks in the galley produce the goods. I asked him one time where he learned to cook. Said he was a dish-washer in one of the New Orleans hotels—used to just *watch* everything the boss cook did and then taste it—peek into the dining-room and see which dishes the guests liked best. That's all there was to it! What a Chink sees done, he remembers! If you meet him along the golden streets of heaven, he'll be doing the thing in exactly the same way—and these two assistants of his aboard of us'll be doing it after *him*. Well—want a little music?"

"You bet! Put on that 'Kamennoi Ostrow.' "

THE man at the wheel struck eight-bells—and the mate came up to relieve the bridge, much to Harry Bradford's disgust. It made him clench his fists and wish he had sufficient excuse for planting a blow on places he sometimes picked out in his mind when Yardley snorted at the music floating out through the Captain's window and expressed his opinion of it:

"Wouldn't that make ye sick, noo! Stuff as sounds like a church or a funeral! Bad luck at sea—that's what *I* calls it! I say! . . . . What'n hell!" He peered into the binnacle to see what was changing the motion of the ship so noticeably. "Who changed the coorse? What the—"

"Cap'n's orders, sir—keep her as she is for the present."

"But—dom the fule! . . . . Owners'll have a bit to say aboot this! Wastin' coal like he was drunk—at the price they're payin' for that Takashima lot! Aye! What'll ye be expectin' o' a Yankee master that knows no better'n to *throw* owners' money!"

"Possibly he has his reasons, sir—that we know nothing about. We *were* heading a bit close to the Macclesfield Bank."

"Aye—but wi' plenty o' leeway f'r a *navigator!* An' once past it, we'd ha'

naught but open sea to the Straits—be seventy or a hundr' ton to the good. The man's a waster an' a fule!"

Some of this floated back to Allen's window from the bridge; subconsciously both he and the engineer caught bits of it, but where Tom Harvey thought nothing of such talk at the time, it stuck in the Captain's mind. Making all due allowance for the mate as a natural-born grouch, there seemed to be an underlying animus in his remarks not explainable on that basis. More than that—as the Captain mulled it over in mind, it seemed to him that Yardley had been alarmed and upset by the change in course, as if he had been counting upon there being no such change, for some reason or other. Presently Harvey went below. Allen sat at his desk a few minutes longer, still figuring upon the mate and what he might have in mind. The more he thought, the more he got bits of that instinctive foreboding which had induced him to put a safer distance between him and the great mass of reefs they had been approaching. Finally, without undressing, he switched off the lights and sat there in the darkness for nearly an hour. Then, as he had more than half expected, the steamer began to pitch more and roll less, showing that she was back on the original course again. Very quietly he stepped out upon the bridge—which was deserted for the moment. The men at the wheel said that the mate had just gone up forward to look at something on the forecastle-head, but Allen's eyes were sharp enough to make out the dim outlines of two figures talking by the door into the forecastle. Picking up a megaphone, he made both of them jump by a sudden bellow from the man they supposed asleep:

"Yardley! Come up here on the bridge!"

The order was given in the unmistakable tone of one accustomed to being obeyed without argument. In a moment the mate came up the ladder—not hurrying *quite* as much as he might, perhaps.

"You ordered the course changed back again! What's the idea?"

"Costin' coal f'r every mile we let her go off, sir! I thocht she'd wasted aboot enough of it, belike!"

"Are the coal-bills your business—or mine? Put her back due sou'east, Yardley —*and keep her there!* When I want the course changed, I'll say so! I'll overlook this—on the supposition that you thought you were doing about right, and that you were in charge of the ship at the moment. But—I'd be careful, if I were you, not to change a master's orders again unless in some emergency where it might be excusable. Do you get that? Well—just keep it in mind!"

IF Yardley really had been thinking over anything mutinous, the time certainly wasn't ripe for it, though he was so blind with rage that his fists knotted with the impulse to land on the Captain's jaw. Vaguely there floated through his mind bits of 'longshore gossip that Joe Allen was said to be a dangerous man to run up against in any sort of a muss. In appearance he was somewhat deceptive—his five feet eleven and hundred and eighty pounds being so perfectly distributed that he looked shorter —much lighter. As to his catlike activity, every man on board had seen demonstrations of this, in one unlooked-for way or another—and the things he did with an automatic pistol one morning, in mid-Pacific, had shown them what sort of chance a man would have if the shipmaster got in the first shot. It was a habit of Allen's to indulge in a little pistol-practice at least once during each voyage—just for the moral effect. Altogether, Yardley considered it best to merely mumble something—and say:

"Very gude, sir. Sou'eas' until furder orders!"

By this time Allen was in no mood for sleep. There was something wrong, somewhere! At one moment he sensed a change in the weather; then—this seemed less likely than something menacing among his crew. Sitting there by his desk in the dark, his fingers touched the radio headframe, and he unconsciously slipped it over his ears, tuning up and down until he caught scraps of talk through the air. At the fifteen hundred-meter wave-length there was nothing but the *"zzp-zzp-zzp-zzp"* of the continental code—some one using a spark with a one-hundred-watt set. At twelve hundred—voices, and Code butting-in. At eighteen hundred—"C. W."—voices alone, considerably clearer, apparently using several kilowatts. At the end of twenty minutes of snatches of talk jumbled by atmospherics, there came a musical voice, perfectly clear:

"Steamer *Wyanomah*—Captain Allen! Steamer *Wyanomah* — Captain Allen! Steamer—*Wy—an—o—mah!*"

Allen had no idea whether this was a "relay" or coming from a distance, but switched on three kilowatts to carry his voice the full radius of his instruments. Obeying an instinctive impulse, he bolted the door and shut his windows before answering—threw a heavy blanket over his head and the transmitter.

"Steamer *Wyanomah*—Allen talking! Steamer *Wyanomah* acknowledging! Who wants me?"

"Is that Captain Allen at the phone?"

"Yes. Joseph M. Allen, master! Who wants me?"

"Hold the phone! . . . . Party in Berkeley, California, asking for you! Wait a second! *There's your party!*"

"Hullo! Hullo, there! That you, Joe?"

"Yes sir—is that Cap'n Amos Jennings?"

"Sure is, my boy—but—say? I'd damn near swear to your voice—but it don't seem possible at any such distance! Got a birthmark that'll identify you?"

"Not at six thousand miles, sir—considering the curvature of the earth. How would a number do? Say—some such figure as Eight—O—Two—O—Ten?"

"Perfectly satisfactory, boy—accordin' to Hoyle! An' speakin' of figgers, I can be sassy too: Say—Seven—seven—'leven! Jee-*mima*—don't this beat hell! When the girl said she could get you, I didn't take any stock in it—not none a-tall!"

"You will when you get the toll-charges—for gassing anything except business! Better make it snappy! What's up?"

"By gosh, you're right, boy! Well—parties been botherin' me f'r a week to sell out my share, an' my partners' shares, in the *Wyanomah*—forty sixty-fourths. Just given me forty-eight hours more to close the deal! Offerin' a figger, considerin' everything, that mebbe's as much as I'd prob'bly get if I *wanted* to sell—though nothin' like what our share's insured for. Now, if any technicality was to come up, throwin' her back under American registry, I'd have to lay her up—mebbe scrap her. Would ye let 'em have the boat?"

"Are the parties making the offer Americans—or foreigners?"

"I reckon they're *Americans*, all right—got the rep of bein' some of the sharpest traders in the shippin' business!"

"Are they making offers on the other boats, too?"

"Nope! Just the *Wyanomah*."

"Hmph! . . . . That's funny! If they were any of the Vancouver crowd, I might understand it. But Americans—wanting to buy a bottom that's under Canadian registry and more than half owned in Frisco? I just don't get it! Looks pretty fishy! And they only give you forty-eight hours more? We can't make Singapore in less than four days—taking the weather as it comes—"

"Everything all right, aboard, Joe?"

"As far as I know—yes sir. One or two little things need looking after, mebbe—but nothing serious—"

"Think you'll fetch her in all right, do ye, boy?"

"Why—with any sort of luck—of course! No master ever knows just what's going to hit him at sea if it's anything out of the ordinary run—but I'm figgerin' on making Keppel Harbor in fairly good time unless something delays me."

"Then—if you was me—you wouldn't sell, hey?"

"No, Cap'n—I *wouldn't!* There's something damn funny about that offer—the boat'll make her first profit in three years, this voyage—a fairly good one, too, now that she's sailing under conditions that let her compete on an even basis! S'pose you nose round a little and find out whether the shippers insured her cargo for all they could get or whether they're carrying just the usual amount. Meanwhile—you leave the boat to me. I'll look after her—some."

"I know ye will, Joe! But this thing's kinda got me guessin'! You keep your eyes peeled—that's what *you* do!"

THINGS were beginning partly to assemble themselves in Allen's mind like certain pieces of a jigsaw puzzle which obviously fit—before the others look as though they had anything to do with them at all. If the boat and cargo actually were over-insured,—and the Jennings interest could be purchased for less than half what they were worth,—somebody might easily stand to make a good many thousand dollars if she had the bad luck to be cast away—burned, sunk. If there were any possible technicality which might come up over the change in registry, it was obvious that Jennings and his partners would better sell for what they could get rather than lay her up like so many hundreds of other good American boats now anchored in our harbors indefinitely, and let her rust to pieces. In fact, anyone hatching up a scheme to get hold of her at just the right moment

could almost gamble upon Jennings' accepting the offer, in the circumstances. Had it not been for his being able to confer with Joe Allen at the critical moment,—a scientific feat yet so new that few believed it possible,—he would certainly have sold his shares. Very well! Then—if these parties unknown were as sure as all that of the San Francisco end of the scheme, they certainly would have arranged something in advance on the boat herself. In that case—Allen wasn't sleepy anyhow, but he didn't even undress until young George Bass came up to take the bridge at eight-bells—and was standing with his door ajar when the mate casually remarked, before going below:

"I suppose the old mon'll be wishing her put back on the reg'lar coorse in a few minutes—'cause it's costin' us coal f'r every foot we go in yon direction—an' the dom rollin's like to start somethin' in the cargo. Ye'll be knowin' when ye should change, belike!"

This wasn't *ordering* the course changed, you'll notice—but it was a crafty suggestion to a young apprentice that, being in charge of the ship for the next four hours, he was supposed to use his own judgment in the matter. Bass, though he knew better than this, was none the less relieved to have the master quietly appear at his elbow and tell him to keep her as she was, regardless of what anyone else said. After which, Allen considered it safe to turn in.

From four to eight in the morning Bill Yardley had the bridge—but didn't consider it safe to interfere with the Captain's orders. From the crack of his door, however, Allen saw him go forward upon some pretext and have another chat with the deckhand Peavey—scarcely more than a few words, but enough to indicate some ununderstanding between them. When the engineer came up to breakfast, Harry Bradford was finishing in time to relieve the mate for the forenoon-watch—and the Captain had a brief conference with them both.

"LOOK here, you fellows! Something's going on aboard of us which I don't understand—but I've got a hunch that Yardley, Mandeville and that foremasthand Peavey, may be mixed up in it. There's something crooked back there in Frisco! Mebbe this is part of it—mebbe not. But I mean to have a look below when I finish breakfast and see if there's anything wrong there. You keep a close watch on Burton Mandeville in the engine-room, Tom—and if you come on deck, tell your second to watch him. Gordon could pass for his first-assistant ticket at any time—if he's not done so already. As I size him up, we can trust him. Harry, you'll have the bridge. If Yardley sticks around during your watch instead of turning in after breakfast, don't let him interfere with you in any way—blow the whistle if you need help! Tell him my orders are to keep away from the fo'c'stle! Don't let Peavey come aft for a minute—if Yardley or Mandeville start talking with him, stop them! Pass the word to George Bass that we may need him if the whistle wakes him up. As there is a door through the bulkhead for'ard of the boilers, I'll take Gordon and go in behind them while Mandeville is on deck or in his room—don't let him into the stokehold while we're there! We can examine the Number Two Hold with an electric torch, and nobody on deck will be the wiser. Afterward we'll take off the hatch and have a look into the Number One. I'll pick out a couple of the men to go below with me—and you see, Harry, that none of the others follow!"

AS the assistant engineer was having his breakfast and smoking a pipe on deck afterward, he had no suspicion of where the Captain and Gordon were, or what they might be up to. And their quiet examination discovered the facts that the bulkhead door, which should have been fast bolted, was open—that a pile of oil-soaked waste had been taken into the Number Two Hold and stacked against the bulkhead for some unknown purpose—that the bracing which had been wedged against some of the heavier cases of machinery as an extra precaution against shifting had been pried away so that the rolling of the previous night had loosened a number of them. To replace these and lever them into firm positions was the work of an hour or more—utilizing the roll of the ship to shift the weight—and just as the job was finished securely enough to promise a reasonable prevention of further shifting, they got a good look at the contents of one case where a batten had been smashed away. Instead of containing painted or well-greased parts of a single machine, as it was billed on the manifest, there was nothing but a jumble of scrap-iron inside—eaten through with rust. It was unnecessary to examine more of the cases. If one

of them contained that sort of thing, there were undoubtedly plenty of others—possibly every case in the hold. Which gave Allen and his second assistant engineer food for thought. The oil-soaked waste they took into the stokehold and fed into the furnaces. The bulkhead door, they wedged fast with spikes in such a way that it couldn't be opened again for several minutes—or without racket enough to be heard all over the ship unless eased by the rolling.

In the Number One Hold, the Captain found that one of the bulkhead-plates between it and the forepeak had been cut with an oxyacetylene torch—apparently, while she was in dock at Vancouver—leaving a hole plenty large enough for a good-sized man to crawl through. A plate of larger size hung loosely from two ring-bolts so that it covered this opening like a perpendicular trapdoor on the hold side of the bulkhead. (Allen recalled the fact that Bill Yardley had been shipped as mate just before she was docked, and had been in charge of her at the time.) Here, also, the bracing had been pried away from some of the heavier cases—but as yet there hadn't been quite motion enough to loosen them, though a smash was likely at any time that heavy weather struck them. Working as quietly as possible, the Captain wedged the braces in place again with the help of his two men and braced the makeshift trapdoor so that it was impossible to push it aside from the forepeak.

THERE had been some curiosity and speculation among the watch on deck as to why the hatch had been opened when they were but a few days from port, and why the Captain had bothered to go below himself instead of letting one of the mates attend to the matter—but somebody said there were a couple of expensive automobiles in the Number One which the old man wanted to be dead sure hadn't been damaged in transit. (Nobody seemed to remember who it was that explained this—first, but when Peavey and the mate heard it, they were considerably relieved for the moment. There actually *were* some automobiles on the manifest, but they knew them to be 1910 models, billed as far more expensive machines of a different make. It was not until a couple of days later that certain men on board realized just what had been going on below, and what the Captain had discovered.

WHEN Allen got back on deck again, saw the hatch battened down and went up to his cabin for a wash, before tiffin, he felt considerably more reassured. He was still looking for trouble of one sort or another before he made port, but felt that it was now likely to be on deck where it could be more effectively handled than some unknown trouble below, where he might be a few minutes late in getting at it. Merely from habit, he clamped the radio head-frame over his ears before going below to the mess-saloon—and was surprised to get a perfect babel of "atmospherics." Evidently something had broken loose at no very great distance—probably within six or eight hundred miles at the outside. Tuning up and down, he got the big Singapore station several times—with a ringing and confusing "harmonic." Back of him, the Manila and Hongkong stations came in more clearly—asking for "repeats"—trying to straighten out the Straits report. A few three hundred-watt sets on scattered vessels could be heard occasionally on the shorter waves. Presently, a voice called, distinctly:

"Steamer *Wyanomah*—Captain Allen! Steamer *Wyanomah!*"

"Aye-aye! This is the *Wyanomah*—Allen talking!"

"Fine! Been trying to pick you up for an hour or more, off an' on! This'll be the *Mongolia*—P & O. Heard some one callin' for you last night, sir—an' inferred you were somewhere behind us. Did you get them?"

"Yes—clearly, thank you. No static then."

"Where are you now, Captain? Could you get the sun at noon?"

"Just managed to! Weather seems to be thickening up. We were exactly on the hundred-and-seventeenth meridian—and seventeen-nine-forty-five, no'th. Bound Singapore way."

"That's approximately where we figured you. We're a hundred an' fifty miles east of the Indo-China coast—about twelve north. Now—just a minute—I'll put you on to Cap'n Graeme's phone! He wishes to speak with you. Here you are! Here's the Captain, now!"

Another voice through the air—bluff and hearty, but a trifle anxious. "Ah! Are you there, Captain Allen? Ah! Capital! I hear you very plainly! Well, now—I'm in a bit of a stew over some radio which came to us an hour ago. Usin'

spark with possibly a hundred watts—you may have heard it last night, eh? Seemed to be an amateur sendin', d'ye see—fancy they'll have naught but a storage-battery —we could just make 'em out. Island schooner—water-logged—auxiliary motor. Very low in the water, but fancied they'd keep afloat for some time. Couldn't make out the sort of cargo. Bound Singapore, but no chance of makin' it. Thought they might go about an' make Manila if the weather held—but it's not goin' to! Our glass is droppin' clear out of sight! Messageries boat twelve hours out of Singapore commenced reportin' a typhoon circlin' west an' south—comin' this way like an express-train—then we got nothin' more from her! Fancy their aërials may have been carried away. Now—d'ye see—if it gets that far up the China Sea an' hits 'em, the schooner'll go under like a shot! She's at least three hundred miles from me, but apparently very close to your course an' not over two or three hours run ahead of you. Schooner *Walakea*—Appleby, master—nine on board, includin' Kanakas. No idea where she's been tradin' or what she's doin' in these waters. Could you look around for her a bit? I'm carryin' mails, you know—an' apparently, there'll be nothin' else within six hundred miles of 'em—nothin' carryin' radio, at least—or sufficiently well found to be reasonably safe in a typhoon if it hits us—"

"That'll be all right, Cap'n! I'll look for 'em as long as the weather permits! Give me the exact position?"

"Hundred an' sixteen, twenty-two, east. Fifteen-thirty-one north at two bells in the forenoon—headin' sou'west. They'd just got the sun for longitude. Er—I trust you're all snug for a blow, Captain? . . . . We're likely to catch it a bit hot, I fancy —with the monsoon just changin'!"

"We'll be making things fast as we go along! . . . . Thanks for the tip!"

"You're quite welcome, I'm sure! . . . . An' many thanks to *you* for takin' the schooner off my hands—we'll have our work cut out for us as it is!"

ACCORDING to Allen's calculations, he would have probably fifteen or twenty hours of fairly good weather before the typhoon reached the upper end of the China Sea—none too much time, if he were to locate a sinking schooner and get her people off. Laying a course direct for the last position reported, he called down to Harvey for all the speed he could get out of his engines. Then he went up to his cabin and sent out call after call in Continental for the *Walakea*—tuning up and down from eighteen hundred to three hundred metres, but listening more intently on the shorter waves. After some two hours' calling, off and on, he got a faint response—evidently sent by an amateur not always sure of his or her letters in the code. (Somehow, he had an instinctive feeling that the sender was a woman.) He could just barely make out the *"zzp-zzp-zzp-zzp"* on the diaphragms of his receivers —but after repeated questioning, got the dead-reckoning position of the schooner at the moment, and after some rapid calculating on his desk-pad, knew she wasn't over twenty miles dead ahead.

In something over an hour the man in the crow's nest on the foremast sighted her —almost awash—a group of people aft on her poop. Running to leeward of her, Allen dropped a boat into the water and sent Harry Bradford to take them off, with their instruments and such luggage as they could get together in a few minutes. The horizon-line to westward was beginning to be obscured; in less than half an hour the Captain figured it would be solid black clear to the zenith. By good luck and excellent seamanship on the part of young Bradford the entire party were on board, the boat lashed securely in her chocks—and the *Wyanomah* racing S. E. safely to clear the sinking schooner, in just twenty-five minutes. By that time it was difficult to see the length of the ship. The air to westward was filled with a dull vibration like incessant and chorused moaning—but around the steamer was breathlessly still, the sea gently heaving in long greasy billows.

ALLEN, with a three-quarter-inch line around his waist lashing him to the iron rail of the wheelhouse, had just time to bellow forward and aft through a megaphone for everybody to hold fast and lash themselves if possible, when with a shriek like the unbearable pitch of a siren at close quarters, the typhoon struck them. The bow of the steamer was knocked around to the north'ard like a chip, laying her on her beam-ends as she slued, until she raced with the momentum of the storm from north to N. W.—to W. N. W.—west—W. S. W.—S. W. Evidently the P & O master had misunderstood the Messageries Liner's

French description of the helix, for it was apparently just the opposite—the typhoon-center revolving in a westerly rather than easterly circuit. Halfway around the compass, it was carrying the *Wyanomah* in the direction Allen wanted to go—but he kept his engines driving her as fast as he dared, in the attempt to claw away from the vortex. After boxing the compass three times, it seemed as though he were beginning to succeed—he was able to keep from being carried much further toward the Borneo reefs than S. S. W., and each time managed to claw back over the due southwest line.

It had been impossible for anyone on deck to stir from where he was lashed—half-drowned by the water that came aboard, though the sea was only beginning to rise in the wake of the storm-center. The two men at the wheel, lashed to the stanchions, had all they could do to keep the compass-card within two points of the S. W. mark. In the stokehold Tom Harvey's Chinamen were tossed from one side to the other with cinders and live coals from under the grate-bars—the water which came down upon them through the gratings slowly increasing until several inches of it were sloshing around with them, in spite of the fact that all of the pumps were going, full force. In the glow from the furnaces, it was an inferno—peopled with glistening, shrieking yellow devils. By evening it seemed as though the ship had worked clear of the vortex and its neighboring influence altogether—but they were by this time bucking terrific seas which at times had the height and force of tidal-waves, accompanied by an after-draught of wind which cut off the tops of them in blinding spray.

Allen had had no time to look after the rescued party from the schooner, nor had any of his officers. Harry Bradford had taken the woman and her luggage to the most comfortable of the extra staterooms, pointed out two more to the eight men, and then hurried across the well-deck to lash himself under lee of the forecastle-head and superintend whatever there was that cound be done up forward. George Bass was aft under shelter of the turtle-deck, with four men.

CHARLEY WANG, as it proved,—somewhat to their surprise,—had in him the qualities of a first-class aviator in that he kept his head with mind on his job, in the midst of turmoil and confusion that were literally chaos. In a few hours he knew that the strain would begin to tell on officers and men who had had nothing to eat since noon, and might not have the opportunity for several hours yet. Doing anything with fire in his ranges was out of the question until the motion either quieted down somewhat or got steadier, but he had a heating-coil of pipe supplied with live steam from the boilers, and managed to get a caldron of scalding-hot coffee ready, with sandwiches, about midnight, when it was somewhat clearer overhead.

After calling in the Captai nand other officers, one at a time, Wang started to rig a trolley-line across the well-deck to the forecastle in order that he might suspend a small caldron of coffee from a snatch-block on it and run the supply forward to the crew—when attempting to *carry* it across the space without spilling was practically impossible. He had gotten his suspension-line rigged and pulled taut,—was attempting to adjust the snatch-block over it,—when an enormous sea came over the weather rail and swept him bodily overboard to leeward.

AT the moment it just happened that the Captain was looking over the rail of the little mess-saloon deck, trying to make out what the Chinaman was up to. Quicker than it can be written down, he saw what happened—knew that a coil of derrick-halliards must be hanging from a belaying-pin in the rail within a few feet of the midship-house—vaulted over the rail and jumped for it, relying upon three or four feet of water in the scuppers to break his fall, which it did. His hand touched the coil as he landed—and another motion hurled it across the Chinaman's shoulders, not more than eight feet away. Instinctively, Wang grabbed it with both hands and hung on for his life, though partly stupefied by the water he'd swallowed. Lashing himself to the iron pin with a couple of turns, Allen began hauling the man in—a job calling for every ounce of strength he had, as the steamer had now rolled up into the weather and Wang was dead-weight against the lee plates, out of water until the next roll.

By the time that came, he was hauled on board. When he had gotten his breath again, he imperturbably resumed, with the Captain's help, the job of rigging his trolley—and in ten minutes more had his

hot coffee in the forecastle. But whenever he caught sight of the shipmaster that night, his eyes followed Allen with the enduring affection of a thoroughbred dog. The idea in the Captain's mind *could* have been that it was worth some risk to save an exceptionally good cook—though you'll probably agree with me that it was less selfish, more instinctive, than that. But from Wang's point of view, the big Number One—the commander of the vessel—had unquestionably risked his life to save that of a yellow man, and the yellow man wasn't going to forget it.

WHEN Allen came below at six bells in the morning, the woman and a boy of eighteen, who proved to be her younger brother, were sitting at the table in the mess-saloon with two of their Kanakas, eating a picked-up lunch which Charley Wang had gotten together for them as soon as the wants of the deck-watch and engine-room force had been attended to. Captain Avery, the girl's father, was unconscious in one of the staterooms from a blow on the skull—one of the booms had fetched loose just before they were taken off the schooner—and was being looked after by his Chinese cook and two Kanakas. Their little Jap diver and another Kanaka were in the next stateroom getting much-needed sleep in spite of the terrific motion.

Claire Avery had had little or no sleep for forty-eight hours; her hair was knotted together any old way, and pretty mussy—her clothes were still damp and bedraggled. But in spite of all this, she was a handsome girl of twenty-five who had taken command of the schooner when her father was disabled; and she was still very much in command of her crew—a capable navigator, and fairly good radio operator for an amateur. Glancing from one to another of the four, the Master saw this—his face wrinkled in a wet but genial smile as he shed his oilskins and sat down for another few cups of coffee.

"Sorry I couldn't see to stowing you more comfortably when you came aboard, but the typhoon was just about ready to break—not a second to spare! Now—you're in Stateroom F with your dunnage? Good! . . . . It's the best we have. And your father's in G, next door, with his Chink and a Kanaka looking after him. I know something about first-aid and such drugs as we carry in the chest—have a look at him in a few minutes. Guess your brother had better take the transom in there in place of the Kanaka. Two of 'em can bunk on the other gangway—but I'm afraid the remaining two'll have to go for'ard with the crew. We haven't any other accommodation for them. What were you carrying, Miss Avery?"

"Shell. One of the finest lots I ever saw. Total loss, of course—we didn't dare insure it! Made us pretty low in the water before the seams began to open. She couldn't have lasted five minutes after the typhoon hit her."

"Where did you get the shell?"

"Oh—down the Islands. We've been trading for three or four years all the way from Tonga up to the Sulu Sea—knew of a dozen places which, so far, haven't been fished by anyone except the natives, and of course, twelve or fourteen fathom is about their limit without a suit. Hashikuru works ten minutes at twenty fathom and has never yet had a touch of the bends. I dare say we might be considered poachers by the Admiralty Courts—but as long as there was no official *tabu* where we went, I'm not worrying over that part of it. We cleared from Sulu, last,—though none of the shell came from that neighborhood,—so didn't think it altogether safe to attempt selling our shell in Manila. In Singapore we could have done business with the Streeter agents and not run much risk of complications. They're not bothering their heads over the Dutch Government *tabus*, and there's no evidence that we came up from Torres Straits or Broome. We were carrying reasonable insurance on the *Walakea*—if Daddy is not badly hurt, as I feared, we're not disposed to complain very much. In the last two years we've done fairly well—enough to stand occasional losses."

WHILE they were chatting in the mess-saloon,—managing to get a few mouthfuls between the pitching,—Bill Yardley had worked his way forward to the forecastle-companion with the aid of a life-line. He and George Bass had the bridge. As the third mate was left in charge, there, he couldn't very well question his superior's movements though he knew the Captain had some reason for keeping the mate aft of the fore-hatch if possible. Every few minutes, great seas broke over the bow, flooding the well-deck with tons of foaming water, black in the starlight—but the "washboards" had been set in their

grooves in each companion so that only a few cupfuls were driven inside through the cracks. Watching his chance between seas, Yardley swung open the door, jumped inside—and slammed it behind him. In the narrow gangway, lighted by a single incandescent, he found Peavey as he had expected.

"Say, Yardley! How did the old man happen to sheer off to the sou'eas', that way? We'd 'a' had her square on the Macclesfield Bank in six hours more! I've got a chart in my chest—worked the dead-reckoning from your last noon position. An' the weather'd ha' been fine f'r a get-away in the boats!"

"Like hell it would! Allen must ha' got word by radio that a typhoon was headed this way! That's why he wouldna chance bein' so close aboord the Macclesfield. We maun thank the deil we're no' down wi' Davy Jones by now, ye mind! I could ha' throttled 'im when he changed the coorse an' gave me th' edge of his tongue—but I'll noo say he was recht. However—we've still our bit cut out f'r us an' little time to do it, d'ye see. I mistrust there may be idees in Allen's mind that'll ha' no business there! For why did he go down an' overhaul the Noomber One—as I'm told he did in my watch below? I been espectin' them heavy cases to shift any minute wi' all this de'l's motion we're gettin'—an' mebbe smash clean through her bilge-plates. But Mandeville passes me th' word the bloody pumps is suckin' even less water than micht be expected wi' a' this fashin'!"

"I was thinkin' of that myself! The men who went below with him say they did a lot of bracin', one place or another—worked a couple of hours at it. But whether Allen knew it had been well stowed an' securely braced before is a question? He couldn't *know* it—or *prove* it! It's impossible for him to know anything about the purchase of the Jennings shares back there in Frisco—carrying the insurance with them, of course—or the sort of junk we've really got in the holds. If this boat ever reaches Singapore and discharges this cargo, it's going to look damn smoky for at least half a dozen people!

"So far, I don't see a shred of proof they could bring against anyone on board. We only stand to lose a few thousands apiece an' the probability of gettin' a knife in our backs in some port where we aint expectin' it. But there's a few pretty respectable-lookin' men back there in Frisco that'll go to the 'pen' for ten or twenty years if the game is exposed. I don't know whether the consignees in Singapore are in on it or not—'cause the ship aint ever supposed to *git* there—but they might be, at that. If the boat *does* get in, they're compelled to pay the ocean freights no matter what sort of junk is in the cases—got no claim against anybody but the shippers. If they do happen to be wise, the Frisco gang'll own the ship before she makes port an' there wont *be* any freights to pay. Case of dividin' up whatever they can git f'r the ship after acceptin' the cargo as if it was all right. But if the old man is really *on*—well, there'll be hell to pay! We ought to have smoother water after another thirty or forty hours—an' we'll have to git busy! First off, though—I wanta chin with some o' them Kanakas off the schooner. I got jest an idee that you an' me kin mebbe take in a little stake on the side—just f'r ourselves."

THE mate's eyes glowed in the dim light as he gave his fellow plotter a long meaning stare.

"Peavey, mon—what hae ye in mind regardin' yon schooner back there?"

"Well—I don't mind telling you, because if you tried to double-cross me, you'd not live long, ashore! I've seen more'n one of them Island schooners loaded down with shell—an' that one had the same heavy, sluggish look. With the amount of shell that she'd be carrying, there must ha' been a tidy lot o' pearls, even if they ran few to the ton. If there were pearls aboard, they certainly were not *left* there to go down with her—they'd time enough to get some dunnage together, you know. The old man was unconscious when they fetched him aboard of us—*he* wouldn't have 'em. The kid brother wouldn't be trusted with 'em—nor any of the crew. That leaves just the girl—she seemed able to boss the outfit, anyhow. Now—with Allen and the chief out of the way, you'll be in command of the ship—those two cubs under you wont give us any trouble. Then we can do as we please with the girl an' whatever she's got, between us."

"Ye'd do the Master in, would ye? An' Tom Harvey wi' 'im?"

"Accidentally—if possible. Shove 'em overboard in this sea when nobody can swear to it—or stave-in the chief's skull so's it'll look like one o' them Chinks did

it! Mandeville oughta handle that without much trouble. We can't keep either one of them men aboard unless in irons—an' that's mutiny, when we git ashore!"

"Where are ye figgerin' on puttin' the ship, noo, mon?"

"Some reef off the North Natuna if the sea goes down enough f'r us to launch the boats. It's right in our track—she'll pound to pieces, there, in a day or so."

THE CAPTAIN didn't attempt to deceive himself into a belief that his troubles were mainly over with the passing of the typhoon. He got six hours good sleep while the steamer was pitching too violently for a boat to be launched—but bolted his door and window-blinds until he woke up. Just what the gang on board were planning to do, he couldn't tell—it might happen at any minute, and he cautioned Tom Harvey to keep an eye on everyone who approached him too closely.

Next morning the sea had gone down considerably. He cleansed and bandaged Captain Avery's head as well as it could be done in the absence of a surgeon—but it looked to him as if the bone had been fractured. During the forenoon watch, he got very well acquainted with Claire Avery and her brother, on the little bridge-deck aft of the wheelhouse and his own cabin. The girl had gotten herself tidied up until her good looks were strikingly evident—making a deep impression upon the two apprentice mates in spite of their being some years younger.

While they were chatting, Bill Yardley suddenly yelled from the bridge, "Fire—in the Number Two Hold, sir!" and sprang down the ladders yelling to the port watch: "Get that hatch-cover off! Couple on the fire-hose!"

Allen had jumped for the bridge at the first word, and looked over the rail, down into the well-deck. Little spirals of thick black smoke were coming out of crevices around the hatch—giving a pretty realistic impression of considerable fire below. Before any of the lashings could be cast off, however, the Captain shouted:

"Hold on, there! . . . . Keep that cover on *tight!* You'll make one hell of a draught if you open it!" Then—through the engine-room telephone: "Below, there! *Tom!* Carry a length of fire-hose behind your boilers and into the Number Two! That bulkhead door has fetched loose! Smells like some waste afire in there! Case of spontaneous combustion, I guess! Let Gordon handle the Chinks! Get the smudge out as soon as you can! If it's waste—shovel ashes on top of it first!"

YARDLEY and the rest of the gang had figured, of course, that the Captain would risk taking off the hatch-cover in an attempt to flood the hold—and had three barrels of gasolene ready to pour down as if it were drinking water, commandeered in the excitement. Had Allen not known exactly the conditions in that hold, and that the assistant engineer must have managed to sneak some more waste in through the bulkhead door, he probably would have acted upon impulse in the emergency as they expected. But as it was, the waste was extinguished, hauled out into the stoke hold in a few minutes. Later, Peavey was thwarted in an attempt to start another blaze in the Number One Hold—he couldn't budge the iron plate, wedged fast on the other side. This left little recourse except doing away with the Captain and chief engineer as soon as possible.

Just what arguments Peavey used with the men of his watch—as they smoked and listened to him from their bunks in the dimly-lighted forecastle—has never been pieced together sufficiently to make a coherent story. Doubtless there may have been vague references to a great bag of pearls—divided among them, share and share—before the boat made port. It was plausible enough, considering what they had picked up from the Kanakas. Certainly five hundred dollars changed hands during that watch below. Then—with Yardley in charge of the bridge, with two of their number at the wheel, seven of them came running aft with iron belaying-pins, knives and a revolver or two.

Three ran up the ladder to force the door of the Captain's cabin, which happened to be in the hook, the others taking possession of the gangways through the midship-house. But they overlooked one man who would seem to have been negligible. Charley Wang had known for a couple of days that something was up—and had been closely watching the fo'c'stle as frequently as his duties permitted. Jumping down the ladder from the mess-saloon, he slammed and bolted the steel door of the port gangway in the faces of the mutineers, who were running across the well-deck; then, poking his head in through the engine-room door, yelled something in guttural Can-

tonese. Instantly there was a rush up the ladders—stokers with knives and grate-bars—naked from the waist up, slippery with machine-oil. Some of them climbed the superstructure like monkeys and fell upon the men at Allen's door like demons dropped from the typhoon—others ran around through the starboard gangway and forced the deckhands out of it, a good deal the worse for wear.

Catching a glimpse of the Captain's head through his window, Yardley drew a pistol to fire at him—but a shot from Allen's automatic smashed three of his fingers and knocked the pistol overboard. Deliberately walking out on the bridge as the stokers were chasing their opponents down the ladders, he struck the mate—once—on the jaw. When the world stopped whirling about him, Yardley found himself in irons—and wore them until he was taken ashore with Peavey and Burton Mandeville, who had attempted to shove a knife into the engineer's back but had been knocked senseless by one of the stokers, with a grate-bar.

The case against Peavey was his attempt, with another mutineer, to throttle and search the girl, who had time for but one scream. Fortunately the Captain had heard it and got below, to her room, in less than five seconds. Peavey was unable to move without assistance for ten days afterward.

THAT afternoon, Claire Avery was in the Captain's room with the head-frame over her ears—having received his cordial permission to practice with anybody who would talk with her, and finding the *Wyanomah's* powerful set much easier to handle than her former toy outfit with its storage-battery. Presently she got a code-call for the Steamer *Wyanomah*—Captain Allen.

"O-o-o-o-h—here's something for you, Captain! . . . . Do you care to risk my getting it—or would you rather—"

"Sure! Acknowledge—tell him to go a bit slow, so you wont get confused!"

"He says: 'Steamer *Wyanomah*—Allen, master—China Sea. Typhoon reported—many boats missing. Did you weather it? Everything all right aboard? When expecting to make port? Jennings."

"Hmph! . . . . I reckon the Captain *has* been some anxious for a couple of days! Evidently, he didn't sell anything. All right—take this, Claire—give it to 'em as distinctly as you can:

"'*Albatross* — San Francisco — Captain Jennings. Weathered good shape, with survivors schooner *Walakea*, Avery, master. No trouble—everything lovely. Due Singapore tomorrow. Keep in touch with purchasers. —Allen.'"

AFTER carefully repeating the message to guard against mistakes, the girl swung around in her chair with an expression of amazement upon her handsome face—to find the Captain lighting his pipe with every appearance of satisfaction and unconcern.

"For goodness' sake, Cap'n! Why didn't you give him some hint of what's been going on aboard of you!"

"No telling who might pick up the radio. I want him in position to arrest that gang in Frisco the moment the Singapore underwriters go up in the air and flap around—as they certainly will. Besides—what's the use of bothering the owner with a mess of my little troubles aboard? I'm supposed to handle anything that comes up, you know—that goes with a master's ticket!"

"Great heavens! You came out of your way to pick us up when a volcano of mutiny was fairly sizzling under your feet, and a typhoon just about ready to break! You got us safely aboard—brought your ship through the worst typhoon *I* ever want to see—doctored poor old Dad as well as any young surgeon might do—and then handled a mutiny of desperate men with long terms of imprisonment ahead of them if this ship reaches port—"

"Charley Wang ought to get the credit of that, if anybody's getting medals pinned on 'em."

"Charley Wang is a darling and helped a lot—but you had discounted the whole thing in advance and made it practically impossible to succeed. Do you know, Joe Allen, I think you're pretty near what *I'd* call a *man!* Eh? Quit fooling! Do you really want to? Well—I—I guess you can—"

And he did.

Another of Culpeper Zandtt's fine stories of "Deep Water Men" will appear in the next—the November—issue of *The Blue Book Magazine*. Be sure to read it.

Rex Takes Them Out

The story of a sheep-dog who was very much of a man, and of a gallant struggle in a mountain storm. You will look forward to Mr. Hall's future stories with pleasurable anticipation.

By AUSTIN HALL

"OU LA!" said the puzzled Jean la Jennette. "Wat zat tam dog see, eh? Always w'en it come dark, he look up at ze moon like he talk to *le bon Dieu.* Jean la Jennette, he no can see; but zat tam dog he see always."

The old Basque humped his stubby body over the fire and poked at the glowing coals, lapsing into the old Iberian tongue that was ever his refuge when he was stirred by dilemma. Beyond him the five thousand sheep lay packed under the light of a cold white moon, a great fleecy carpet whose wool would some day be parading the streets of a hundred cities. From the cañon the call of the wolf lifted to the top of the mountain. At the sound of the wolf-howl the old sheep-dog lifted his head. Once again he came over to Jean la Jennette and lifted his paw, whining the warning that he could not speak.

"Ah," said Jean, "wat you see, eh? *Le bon Dieu,* He speak to ze dog, but He no speak to ze man. Is it not so? An' ze Rex, he try to tell his good Jean la Jennette."

The old Basque picked up the paw and held his swarthy cheek close to that of the shepherd; and at the moment a "doty" top snapped with a loud report out in the forest. The dog leaped to his feet, his hair bristling along his spine and his bob tail at its perpendicular angle of defiance.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the Basque. "He know. Never you beat zat tam dog. Tomorrow we go down ze mountain to see ze Monsieur."

EACH year, with the coming of June, Bob Arnold had made a practice of running thousands of sheep into the high Sierras, where for four months the flocks could grow fat upon the rich succulence of the mountain meadows. But this year he had gone one better and directed Jean to herd them clear up to the Alpine heights. For three months, now, the old Basque had been living in an open para-

dise, where Rex had run the sheep, and where the old sheep-herder had had nothing to do but sit by the running waters and croon the chant of his Iberian melodies. There had been nights under the summer stars—glorious nights, with the full moon poised on the peak of the mountain, and long soft shadows stealing over the floor of the forest—nights perfumed with the primeval scent of pine and spruce, and rhythmic with the rush of rippling waters. And the days—long days with the woolly pack feeding in the sunlit meadows, with Rex always watching, head between his paws or straight up, with bobbed tail lifted. Down in the cañon roared the snow-fed river, and to the east the snow-capped peaks blended their pink-white grandeur with the azure of the summer sky. Again great clouds of piled-up billows rolled down from the heights, booming thunder and lashing the forest giants with the whip of their Jovian fury. For half an hour! Then the cataclysmic moments passed, and the sun came out on the dripping forest.

Great days!

But now August had come, and with it a mystery in the air that only the dog with his instinct could understand. Up on the eight-thousand-foot line the nights had suddenly become crystalline. Jean la Jennette lay on his back and interpreted the fire-point stars through the medium of his Basque tradition. He had still a month to stay, and no one in all the world loved the ways of Nature more than he.

But the old dog had suddenly become restless. Each night now, he crawled up to his master and thrust his cold nose against his cheek. The stars were burning out of a glassy sky, and the midnight breeze was soughing up the cañons. Strange warnings were in the air—warnings that the man could not see, but which the old dog caught out of his inherited instinct. It was invisible and inscrutable, but it was as pervading as the night itself—like a vast whispering: the rustle of leaves, the snap of the air, the intangible message that bespoke the mountain winter. Because he was a dog and had no calendar but his bones, Rex caught the message. Snow was coming. It was time for the sheep to be driven from the summits. He tried to tell old Jean; but the man was trained in the tradition of the past and gave no thought to such a thing as a snow in August.

So there was a delay. For two more days Jean la Jennette—in spite of his promise that he would go down to the Monsieur—hung around the pleasant mountain pastures. Then on the third day a gray scum spread over the sky, the deep forest lay silent under a great day twilight, and the man began to understand. That night there were no stars. About ten o'clock he was awakened by a pressure upon his bed, and when he thrust his head out of his blankets, he found two inches of snow. He could hear the breath like fall of the sailing flakes—Nature pulling her silent blanket over the tops of the mountains. The dog thrust up his cold nose, and whined. The great sheep-pack was invisible under the carpet of white; but the sheep-herder could sense its restless stirring. In the morning he must start down mountains for the winter pastures of the San Joaquin.

But by morning the snow had reached a depth of six inches, and it was still snowing. It was no time to linger. Without building a fire, Jean snatched a piece of bread and cheese and threw his pack upon the patient burro. Then he whistled to Rex and with the right arm signal sent him scurrying after the sheep. The pack rose to its feet, milled about a few moments, then fell in behind the bell burro.

From the start the way was difficult; the snow was almost impassable, and the air was so thick with flakes that Jean la Jennette was himself forced to play the part of a sheep and to follow the bell. Only the instinct of the dog, and his marvelous intuition, made progress possible. Staggering along under the storm's obscurity, the Basque harkened to the sharp *whoofs* of the dog, and the guiding tinkle of the bells. Always they went on, down the ridges, slowly fighting their way under the guidance of the old dog's wisdom.

But the snow was gaining and the intensity of the storm was such that for hours the man had nothing to guide him but sound. The way was slow. All the world had suddenly turned white. Inch by inch the snow piled up; and hour by hour they fought their way to the lower levels. At first they clung to the ridges; but along in the afternoon the old dog swung them off and headed them down a hog-back. The way became more difficult than ever; always the flock, under the spur of the dog's herding, fought against the rampart of snow. All day the old dog

kept them milling, using the head sheep to break the way and letting them fall back as soon as they were tired. In this way they fought on and on, breaking through, heading down. But when afternoon came, Jean la Jennette realized that they would not make the snow-line. Another night, and his predicament would be perilous. He must go on. Over and again he thanked *le bon Dieu* for the fact that he had Rex to help him.

JEAN had not, however, come to the heart of his difficulty. About four o'clock in the afternoon he came to a heap of rocks and mounted them in an effort to get a better view. The rocks were of course wet with snow. And just as he stepped to the top of a huge boulder, his foot slipped and he came crashing down on his hip. He felt something snap, and a hot pain shot up his back; then he rolled over —and found that he had only the use of one leg. Not only that—but the other one was twisted into a grotesque position, stretched out at an angle that no leg could assume without being broken. When he had steeled his nerves to the intensity of the torture, he discovered that he had broken the bone close to the hip. His position had before been bad enough, but now it was really perilous. Yet though first aid was forty miles away, he did not lose his presence of mind. There was nothing to do but stop the sheep and call the dog back from the pack. In a moment the flock was halted under the snow-storm and the dog was standing before him.

"Ah," said the Basque, "see, Rex! Ze good Jean la Jennette has broke ze leg. An' ze walk he no can do. He must now ride ze good burro Napoleon." He patted the dog on the head and pointed to the burro: "You bring to Jean zat tam donk."

But the burro Napoleon was not in the humor of turning back. Wherefore, there was a great clatter of the bell before Rex was able to bring him around to his master; and there was still more maneuvering before he had him in a position where Jean could get a grip on the canvas pack. But at last the old man got a hold, and with great agony pulled himself up on the mount. Jean la Jennette had had the training of the wild, and he knew that, come what might, he must go on. The torture was exquisite, and each movement of the burro sent a goring knife-thrust twisting up his spine. But he clung on and drove the burro back to the head of the flock. Once again they were headed down the mountain.

BUT human flesh can only go through so much agony. Old Jean had the heart of a lion and a gameness that was second to none; but his nerves were only human. With one leg gone, he had to cling sidewise and let the other limb dangle. Every move, every twist, sent a million needles of hot agony racing through his body. Before he had gone a hundred yards, the whole world had become a blur, and nausea had settled upon him. He tried to hold on, gripping the pack with his stubby fingers and stooping his head against the drive of the storm; but little by little his consciousness began to lapse under the flood of his torture.

Then came a great peace, a quietness and a calm that was bereft of all turbulence and motion. The next he knew he was lying on the snow with the old dog whining by his side and lapping his face. The great flock was packed close by, and the burro was humped to the storm. He knew that he had fainted and that he could not go on. Then he thought of the Monsieur and sat up; but before he could get into position he had to shift the twisted limb around. Once again the nausea settled upon him, and he had to seize the dog to keep from falling back. The dog whined and held close, pressing in his cold muzzle and sniffing his encouragement. The old man knew—knew the courage of the dog and his wisdom; that he had halted the flock and had sought, in his dog's way, to nurse him back to consciousness. It was getting along toward night; the leaden sky had darkened, and the snow was still falling. The old dog! He remembered the dog's warning and how he had talked to *le bon Dieu*.

"Ah," said Jean la Jennette, "zat dog, he know. *Le bon Dieu,* He talk to zat dog; and zat dog he try to tell his good Jean la Jennette. But Jean la Jennette, he tam fool. He know zat ze God, He tell to ze dog; but he do not listen. Now Jean has broke ze leg. But zat dog he love his Jean just ze same." Then in an excess of emotion he gripped the old dog about the neck. He was thinking of the sheep and what he owed to the Monsieur. "Ah," he said, "never before has Jean la Jennette lost even ze one sheep. What will ze Monsieur say? Five thousand

sheep! Every one them sheep, she now go to hell for sure. *Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!"*

The dog registered his answer by lapping the old man's tears; but at last, as though he knew that time was fleeting, he turned to the sheep-pack, and whined. Night was falling, and Jean la Jennette knew that even with a good leg, he could not have gone much farther. He had to camp, and speedily. The dog knew. He even went out and brought the recalcitrant Napoleon back to his master. And while he was doing it, Jean had time to go over the situation and build up a plan that would carry him over the night. He was lying in an open spot under the shelter of a small bluff not eighty feet away, along the base of which a big pine had been twisted from its stump and thrown across the flat. If he could gain the stump he could set it afire and have warmth to last him through the night—and for several more, if he chose to stay there. The sheep could remain where they were. With a little time and composure, he might be able to figure a way out of his difficulty. And perhaps, too, it would stop snowing by morning.

The dog seemed to go into his plans, and very carefully nursed the burro up to his master, where, with great difficulty, Jean pulled himself up and clung on until he had come to the coveted stump. Then he untied the canvas and let the pack fall to the ground—following which he sought out his hand ax and dragged himself over to the tree. Then with swift strokes he cut into the pitchy wood, piled the splinters against the stump, and set it afire. In a minute the flames were leaping over the broken snag, and the camp was set.

THAT night was a long one to Jean la Jennette. He could not have slept, because of the pain in his leg; but the pain was as nothing compared to his solicitude for the sheep. He had always taken pride in his reputation of being the crack herder of the Monsieur; and when the Monsieur had said, in June, that only Jean was to be trusted on the high altitudes, he had taken it as the crown of his reward. The Monsieur had trusted him with the sheep; and now—Jean knew that the sheep were lost.

Still the snow fell. A great silence had spread over the mountain forest—a silence musical with the fairylike whispering of the falling snow. The fire leaped to the top of the stump, and the flare of the light brightened the snow in the pine tops. The sheep watched out of their flat-slitted eyes; and the old dog, his nose snuggled close, gazed out into the night at the ever-deepening blanket. The old fellow knew; not for nothing was he a sheep-dog with an inheritance of a thousand years of watching. He knew the sheep, and he knew his master; and his master was in trouble. Always when the tears came to the old man's eyes, the dog put his nose in his lap and whined his assurance; and always his assurance brought up the hopes of Jean la Jennette. Through the long hours they sat side by side, brooding a way out of their difficulty; and as a last resort, Jean la Jennette prayed to *le bon Dieu.*

And *le bon Dieu,* He spoke to Jean la Jennette!

Ah, that was it! Jean could not write; but he could send a message to the Monsieur. "Zat tam dog!" He put his arms about the old dog's shaggy neck, and crooned aloud: "Ah, *le bon Dieu!* He love zat tam dog; an' zat dog, he must save ze sheep!"

When he had given vent to his delight, Jean la Jennette set himself to work. First he took his hand ax and dug into the log, clipping away until he had come to the clear white wood, where he cut out a chip and shaped it to the size of his hand, planing it carefully with his knife, until he had given it the proper smoothness. Then he took a splinter and whittled it to the size of a pencil, sharpened it to a long point and held it to the fire, and when it was thoroughly ablaze, pulled it out and snuffed it with his stubby fingers. Then he repeated the experiment until he had a good marker. When he was satisfied with that part, he placed the chip against his good knee, and with the impromptu crayon, began the practice of his crude artistry.

When he had the picture drawn, he emptied his tobacco pouch and placed therein the hieroglyphic chip. Then he took a buckskin thong, ran it through the lacings and tied the whole about the old dog's neck. The Monsieur would read the picture, and the Monsieur would understand. That was what a Monsieur was

for—to reason and to know all things; and then the Monsieur would come for his good Jean la Jennette.

MORNING came, and the leaden sky shone through the falling snow. Jean la Jennette knew that he had only a few more hours to get the sheep out of the mountains; and that perhaps even then, he was too late. It would take herding of the best kind to get them to the lower levels—hours of grinding drive wherein the dog, unaided, must pit his wit against the merciless storm. But he knew the dog and had seen him go through many a trial; the dog knew sheep, and would die before he would leave them. Best of all, the dog knew and understood Jean la Jennette. Wherefore, when it was fully daylight he called him up, took down the canvas pack, and divided what was left of his bread, knowing well that the dog would have nothing more to eat until he was out of the snow. Then he took him in his arms and with the interpellation of many a caress, explained in his simple way what was to be done.

"See," he said, *"ou là!"* He pointed down the mountain. "Ze Monsieur—ze sheep. Rex, she take ze sheep to ze Monsieur. See—ze sheep." He held the dog up to his breast and pointed to the pack; and the dog, in an ecstasy of affection, wriggled and tried to lick his face. *"Non, non,"* said Jean la Jennette. "You be goot dog now. See, Rex. Ze sheep—ze Monsieur." The dog followed the direction of his finger, whined and looked up at his face. *"Oui, oui!"* said Jean. "Now he know. Zat dog, she know. Is it not so? Rex, she take ze sheep to ze Monsieur." Rex whined and looked out at the white-coated pack. He and Jean la Jennette had a code of conversation all their own. Wherefore Jean could tell when his words had penetrated the old dog's understanding. "Ze Monsieur—ze sheep!"

The old man knew that the dog had got the message; so he took the pouch, opened it and held the chip to the dog's nose. Very curiously and with all due gravity Rex smelled of the stick. Here was something tangible and concrete, something that bore the scent of his master. He had carried messages before, and he could understand. The Monsieur—that was easy. He must carry the little stick to the Monsieur. But the next instruction was a complex one; and though Jean was no naturalist, he knew out of long observation that any dog, however bright, finds difficulty in a complex situation. He knew that he had gotten the Monsieur part over; but could he make the rest clear? He turned the dog around and pointed down the mountain to the hidden cañon where the river boomed on its way to the ocean. If the dog could understand this part, there would be a fair chance of getting the sheep out.

"See," he said, "ze river! Rex, he takes ze sheep to ze river an' to ze Monsieur. An' he gives to Monsieur ze little stick. An' then Rex she come back wiz ze Monsieur to his good Jean la Jennette. Is it not so? Yes?"

Over and again he repeated the words, until he was convinced that he could do no more. For the last time he pointed at the sheep; and then he released the dog.

"Ou là!" he sang out; and he gave the whistle for the morning round-up.

The old dog was off like a streak, scooting through the snow, circling the flock. The burro rose grudgingly to his feet, shaking his hide and wagging his long ears at the morning interruption; the pack stirred, undulated and lifted itself out of the white blanket. Twice the dog raced about the flock, his sharp bark piercing the frosty air. Then with head up and bob tail lifted, he looked back to Jean la Jennette. Jean la Jennette, crouched by the fire and unable to move, waved his hand.

"Ze Monsieur!" he shouted. "Rex, she take ze sheep to ze Monsieur. To ze river! An' also ze little stick. *Ou là!"* And when the pack began moving, he called out his love and gave vent to his simple tears.

THE dog knew. From his puppyhood he had lived with the good Jean la Jennette, sharing his meat, watching by his side as a brother who loved the sheep. Theirs was a communion, with love at the bottom of all things, and with the sheep as the motive of that love. The Basque's words were not above the dog's understanding; and he knew, just as well as the other, how to handle the sheep. His instinct was infallible, and it was backed by love.

The dog worked quietly, running the flanks of the flock and heading them down the long white slope. The burro kept the lead, picking his way daintily, and browsing hungrily on the leaves as he passed

along; and above it all the musical tinkle of the bells rhymed with the *whoofs* of the sheep-dog. But at the turn in the woods, the old fellow retreated to the rear and looked back at the burning stump where the disconsolate Jean was sitting alone. He stopped still, and whined. For a moment—and then like a brown-black streak he raced over the trodden snow to the fire and Jean la Jennette, scooting and leaping about to give expression to his love, and winding up by thrusting his cold black nose against the old man's cheek. For several minutes the man held the dog in his arms; and then he sent him back to the sheep. And because Rex was a sheep-dog and was ruled by a thousand generations, he had naught to do but obey. But even those generations could not keep him from stopping now and then to look at the stricken figure. Very meekly he picked up the flock where it waited under the pines and started it through the snow-bound forest.

Luckily the snow had stopped falling; the air was clear under the still leaden sky; and the white blanket, far spread, was riveted by the cold frosty silence. The only sound was the booming of the far-distant river, the swishing *thrum* of the pack's twenty thousand little feet and the ring of the silver bells. Where the pack moved, there was music and stir; but after it had passed, the deep silence settled upon the white-banked forest. To the east the high glacial peaks lifted their mantled shoulders in sheer splendor. Winter was coming to the high altitudes, the first breath that sent man and sheep scurrying to the warm paradise of the grass-green valleys. Down the long slopes Rex must work the sheep, avoiding the steep cañons until he could reach the mild air of the softer altitudes.

AT first he made good progress, pacing the donkey along the sheltered ways and avoiding the spots where the snow was deepest. All alone he worked, running the flanks, leaping through the snow or bringing up the rear. His barks rang sharp and clear, barks that bore the intonation of command and the love that was a part of his being. He loved the sheep, loved to drive them, to follow them and to live in their smell; and his love was shared by the sheep. Under his guidance the flock was a compact, living thing creeping through the storm-bound forest. The pack undulated, passed in and out behind the lead of the bell burro; and as on the day before, Rex kept them milling so as to keep new sheep against the soft snow in front.

His sagacity measured up to every moment. At times the bell burro would stop to investigate a bit of birch brush, and when the pack jammed back, Rex would stand up with his forepaws on the sheep and bark his warning; and if the warning brought no response, he would leap upon the packed backs and race across the woolly carpet to the recalcitrant one, nip him in the heels and send him bouncing through the snow. Then he would retreat to one side and let the sheep pass by, taking up his place of honor in the rear.

But after a few hours the storm settled in again; the leaden sky lowered, and the snow fell thicker than ever. The world became a blur of falling flakes, ghostly pine trees and fleecy motion. The dog's instinct was taxed to the utmost. Time and again he had to repeat the trip across the flock to take care of the stubborn burro; and time and again the sheep backed up as if there were no making headway against the storm; and at last they jammed for good. When Rex went ahead to investigate, he found the burro wagging his head defiantly. They had come to a cut where the snow was of double thickness and where the sheep, try as they might, could make no way against its depth. Here at last they had come to the end.

BUT here again the thousand generations of his ancestry bespoke themselves. Rex had been sent ahead with the sheep and told to take them out; and that was the only thought that he had in mind. They had to go on. Wherefore he sized up the snow, tested it out, and turned his attention to the donkey. His sagacity, coupled with his training, told him that the burro could go on even if the sheep could not; so he set his teeth into the donkey's hocks and sent him racing through the cut until he had come to the end of the deep snow, where he turned him about and ran him back toward the sheep, heading him off and turning him around so as to tramp down the drift. For fifteen minutes the jangle of the donkey's bell and the barks of the sheep-dog commingled into pandemonium; but at the end of that time there was a well-defined trail trampled through. Then he returned to the flock

and let it feed, ten deep, into the broken way, and when the last sheep had passed, he brought up the rear.

All that day he battled against the storm, pitting his wit against the emergencies, working down the mountains. When night came, he herded the flock into a protected spot and waited for the morning.

And it was a long wait. Besides, night brought new problems—problems that made him a watchdog as well as the shepherd. Scarcely had darkness fallen when the forest gave up its wolves and sent them in to investigate the manless flock. After working all day, the old dog had to watch all night to keep the wolves from rushing in to the slaughter. The flock slept peacefully under the snow, and there was no sound but the occasional tinkle of a little bell. Through the night the old fellow passed his time walking about the big flock, rubbing his coat against their woolly sides, or sleeping next to them with his keen nose pointed out at the wild. The wild was his enemy; and he was the enemy of all that the wild contained. Throughout the day he could be tender and merciful; but at night when the wolves began sneaking out of the gulches, he reverted to the savage.

Every breath that drifted through the pines brought Rex the scent of enemies. He halted; and the guttural defiance that gurgled from his shaggy throat was the expression of his hate. The sheep were the most wonderful things in the world, and he could not understand how any living creature would molest them. Wolves! He had known them all his life—and he had been taught to kill them. They were after the Monsieur's sheep. Jean la Jennette had said to take the sheep to the Monsieur; and Jean la Jennette knew. What a wonderful creature was Jean la Jennette! With his nose on the snow and his eyes peering out into the darkness, the dog ruminated, in his canine way, over the reason of things. Something had happened to Jean la Jennette; he knew that Jean was wounded and that he could not follow; and now Jean had sent him ahead with the sheep. That was all. But that made it the sum total and the end of all things—to the dog. His was the pride of the shepherd; and his the courage.

Two by two the eyes of the wild things blazed out of the darkness; two by two, in an ever-increasing circle—the old story of the carnivora and the shepherd, and as old as the story of the first man and the first dog. He was outnumbered, and at the first rush he would have gone under; but he was undaunted, undaunted because he was a sheep-dog and because he had behind him a thousand ghostly ancestors just as noble and gallant as himself. All night long he walked about the flock, head and bob tail up, snarling at the wolf pack that had headed in to the feast. And not one of the ravenous guests dared come in to test the mettle of his courage.

MORNING broke at last, and he headed once more down the mountain. With the coming of daylight the clouds broke away; the sunlight came out upon the heights, and little by little, the snow diminished, until by the time they had reached the booming river, it had become only a trace. He made fast progress. The sheep turned into the easy sands that bordered the lapping waters and headed downstream. Overhead the alders drooped their graceful boughs in a sylvan canopy. The air was soft and full of musical sounds—the swishing of waters, the buzz of the daylight forest, and the musical tinkle of the silver bells.

The pack moved along between the river and the green banks, with the burro leading the way and the old dog behind barking his pean of exultation.

Downstream they went, until they came to the high bluffs where the river plunged in a torrent, and where only the most experienced dog would be able to drive the flock. When they came to the bluffs, Rex halted the pack and went ahead to reconnoiter. A thousand feet below was a farmhouse cuddled in a spread of green pastures, with cattle moving about and men walking to and fro. Very carefully he searched, until he found a trail that led down the face of the heights; and when he had satisfied himself that it had been used and that he could work the sheep down, he returned to the pack. Then he started the bell burro and sifted the sheep through in thin formation.

DOWN below, John Williams, proprietor of the famous meadows, was watching the advent of the sheep at the crest of the heights—a pretty sight, and a most unusual one. Unusual, because it was far off the regular route employed by the valley flocks on their way to and from the summits; besides, he had never before seen a flock

driven out of the cul-de-sac. Wherefore, when the dog started the burro, and the long white line began meandering across the rocky face of the bluff, he called to his companion:

"Some herding, that! Watch that dog handle the sheep."

For half an hour the two men watched the strange sight—the long line of sheep, the bell burro picking his way in the lead, and the indefatigable dog bringing up the rear or working along the perilous brink on his way to reconnoiter. The dog was everywhere, in and out, working the sheep; and the pack was just as well trained as its driver. There was no crowding and no confusion. Against the face of the rocks the bells tinkled an elfin cadence. The dog held command, his barks ringing clear, and each bark bringing an answering response of movement. All alone the old dog worked with no man to help him. And because there was no man, John Williams could not help but wonder. When the flock was safe on the level, the dog came forward. The sheep fell to feeding on the soft green grass. Then Williams got his first good view of the big dog and his bob tail. He whistled.

"Hello!" he said to his companion. "It's Rex. Arnold's Rex! Hello, Rex, old boy! Come here." He patted the dog on the head. "Some dog, eh, old fellow? Some dog! Hello! What have we got here?"

Rex was looking up into his face, his tan-brown eyes speaking what his lips could not utter. Whining, he looked at the sheep and then at the snow-covered mountains to the east. And the man seemed to understand; he carefully opened the pouch and took therefrom the wooden chip. Rex lay down at his feet, his keen muzzle sniffing and his eyes watching.

"Hello!" said the man. "What's this? A message! Picture of a man. Looks like a broken leg. So that's why you're alone, is it? Up in the snow. Herder hurt and sends his dog on with the sheep!" He turned to his companion and handed him the chip. "What do you make of it, Bill?"

"Looks like it to me. So this is Arnold's Rex. I've heard—"

But the other had started for the farmhouse. "Yes," he called back, "you've heard right. Come on. We've got to telephone to Bob Arnold. Here, Rex, we'll go and get something to eat."

But Rex did not follow. Instead, he stepped up to the man who held the chip, jumped up, and caught it in his mouth. Nor would he go on, until the man had replaced it in the pouch and strapped the whole to his neck. Jean la Jennette had said to take it to the Monsieur; and that was sufficient. It would have to remain there until it was in the hands of his other master.

BOB ARNOLD was already in the mountains. At the first warning of snow, he had left the ranch in the San Joaquin and started for the summit. Williams got him by telephoning over to the route and running the message along the line until he caught him at one of the small stations. In four more hours Bob had reached the meadows with a doctor. When he saw the old dog, he took him in his arms and caressed him like a son.

"This is about nineteen times," he said, "that this old dog has saved my sheep. Some people wonder at his five-thousand-dollar value. Five thousand! And he has just saved me thirty thousand dollars! And now he'll take us to Jean la Jennette."

And that is just what the dog did. In four more days they were back at the Williams ranch; and four hours later Jean la Jennette, his leg safely set in a cast, was cuddled in a feather bed. By his side was the old sheep-dog. Jean la Jennette's eyes were glowing with pride.

"Ah, Monsieur," he said, "zat dog, she know. *Le bon Dieu,* He talk to zat dog; an' zat dog, she try to tell his good Jean la Jennette. But Jean la Jennette, he's tam fool. So he break ze leg. Then Jean la Jennette, he pray to *le bon Dieu.* An' *le bon Dieu,* He tell heem wat to do. Zat dog, she know; he save ze sheep; an' he save ze good Jean la Jennette also. Ah, Monsieur," said the good Jean la Jennette, "never you beat zat tam dog!"

"Rex Goes to Court," another of Austin Hall's fine stories of this splendid sheep-dog, will be published in an early issue of *The Blue Book Magazine.* Be sure to read it.

Mrs. Opalsen's Pearls

A specially interesting exploit of that sprightly detective Hercule Poirot, described most engagingly by the author of "The Affair at the Victory Ball."

By AGATHA CHRISTIE

"POIROT," I said, "a change of air would do you good."

"You think so, *mon ami?*"

"I am sure of it."

"Eh—eh?" said my friend, smiling. "It is all arranged, then."

"You will come?"

"Where do you propose to take me?"

"Brighton. As a matter of fact, a friend of mine in the city put me on to a very good thing; and—well, I have money to burn, as the saying goes. Come!"

"Thank you, I accept most gratefully. You have the good heart to think of an old man. And the good heart, it is in the end worth all the little gray cells. Yes—yes, I who speak to you am in danger of forgetting that sometimes!"

I did not quite relish the implication. I fancy that Poirot is sometimes a little inclined to underestimate my mental capacities. But his pleasure was so evident that I put my slight annoyance aside.

"Then that's all right," I said hastily.

Saturday evening saw us dining at the Grand Metropolitan in the midst of a gay throng. All the world and his wife seemed to be at Brighton. The dresses were marvelous, and the jewels magnificent.

"It is a sight, this!" murmured Poirot. "This is the home of the Profiteer; is it not so, Hastings?"

"Supposed to be," I replied. "But we'll hope they aren't all tarred with the profiteering brush."

Poirot gazed round him placidly.

"The sight of so many jewels makes me wish I had turned my brains to crime, instead of to its detection! What a magnificent opportunity for some thief of distinction! Regard, Hastings, that stout woman by the pillar! She is, as you would say, plastered with gems!"

I followed his eyes.

"Why," I exclaimed, "it's Mrs. Opalsen!"

"You know her?"

"Slightly. Her husband is a rich stockbroker who made a fortune in the recent oil-boom."

AFTER dinner we ran across the Opalsens in the lounge, and I introduced Poirot to them. We chatted for a few

minutes, and ended by having our coffee together.

Poirot said a few words in praise of some of the costlier gems displayed on the lady's ample bosom, and she brightened up at once.

"It's a perfect hobby of mine, Mr. Poirot. I just *love* jewelry. Ed knows my weakness, and every time things go well, he brings me something new. You are interested in precious stones?"

"I have had a good deal to do with them one time and another, madame. My profession has brought me into contact with some of the most famous jewels in the world."

He went on to narrate, with discreet pseudonymns, the story of the historic jewels of a reigning house, and Mrs. Opalsen listened with bated breath.

"There now!" she exclaimed as he ended. "If it isn't just like a play! You know, I've got some pearls of my own that have a history attached to them. I believe it's supposed to be one of the finest necklaces in the world—the pearls are so beautifully matched, and so perfect in color. I declare I really must run up and get it!"

"Oh, madame," protested Poirot. "You are too amiable. Pray do not derange yourself!"

"Oh, but I'd like to show it to you!"

The buxom dame waddled across to the lift briskly enough. Her husband, who had been talking to me, looked at Poirot inquiringly.

"Madame your wife is so amiable as to insist on showing me her pearl necklace," explained the latter.

"Oh—the pearls!" Opalsen smiled in a satisfied fashion. "Well, they *are* worth seeing. Cost a pretty penny, too! Still, the money's there, all right—I could get what I paid for them any day, perhaps more. May have to, too, if things go on as they are now. Money's confoundedly tight in the city. All this infernal—" He rambled on, launching into technicalities which I could not follow.

He was interrupted by a small page-boy who approached and murmured something in his ear.

"What? I'll come at once. Not taken ill, is she? Excuse me, gentlemen."

HE left us abruptly. Poirot leaned back and lighted one of his tiny Russian cigarettes. Then carefully and meticulously he arranged the empty coffee-cups in a neat row, and beamed happily on the result.

The minutes passed. The Opalsens did not return.

"Curious," I remarked at length. "I wonder when they will come back."

Poirot watched the ascending spirals of smoke, and then said thoughtfully: "They will not come back."

"Why?"

"Because, my friend, something has happened."

"What sort of thing? How do you know?" I asked curiously.

Poirot smiled. "A few moments ago the manager came hurriedly out of his office and ran upstairs. He was much agitated. The lift-boy is deep in talk with one of the pages. The lift-bell has rung three times, but he heeds it not. Thirdly, even the waiters are *distrait,* and to make a waiter *distrait*"—Poirot shook his head with an air of finality—"the affair must indeed be of the first magnitude. Ah, it is as I thought! Here come the police."

Two men had just entered the hotel, one in uniform, the other in plain clothes. They spoke to a page, and were immediately ushered upstairs. A few minutes later the same boy descended and came up to where we were sitting.

"Mr. Opalsen's compliments, and would you step upstairs?"

POIROT sprang nimbly to his feet. One would have said that he awaited the summons. I followed with no less alacrity.

The Opalsens' apartments were situated on the first floor. After knocking on the door, the page retired, and we answered the summons to come in. A strange scene met our eyes. The room was Mrs. Opalsen's bedroom, and in the center of it, lying back in an armchair, was the lady herself, weeping violently. She presented an extraordinary spectacle, with the tears making great furrows in the powder with which her complexion was liberally coated. Mr. Opalsen was striding up and down angrily. The two police officials stood in the middle of the room, one with a notebook in hand. A hotel chambermaid, looking frightened to death, stood by the fireplace, and on the other side of the room a Frenchwoman, obviously Mrs. Opalsen's maid, was weeping and wringing her hands with an intensity of grief that rivaled that of her mistress.

Into this pandemonium stepped Poirot, neat and smiling. Immediately, with an energy surprising in one of her bulk, Mrs. Opalsen sprang from her chair toward him.

"There, now! Ed may say what he likes, but I believe in luck—I do. It was fated I should meet you the way I did this evening, and I've a feeling that if you can't get my pearls back for me, nobody can."

"Calm yourself, I pray of you, madame." Poirot patted her hand soothingly. "Reassure yourself. All will be well. Hercule Poirot will aid you!"

Mr. Opalsen turned to the police inspectors.

"There will be no objection to my—er—calling in this gentleman, I suppose?"

"None at all, sir," replied the man civilly, but with complete indifference. "Perhaps now your lady's feeling better, she'll just let us have the facts?"

Mrs. Opalsen looked helplessly at Poirot. He led her back to her chair.

"Seat yourself, madame, and recount to us the whole history without agitating yourself."

MRS. OPALSEN dried her eyes gingerly, and began:

"I came upstairs after dinner to fetch my pearls for Mr. Poirot here to see. The chambermaid and Celestine were both in the room as usual—"

"Excuse me, madame, but what do you mean by—'as usual'?"

Mr. Opalsen explained:

"I make it a rule that no one is to come into this room unless Celestine, the maid, is there also. The chambermaid does the room in the morning while Celestine is present, and comes in after dinner to turn down the beds under the same conditions; otherwise she never enters the room."

"Well, as I was saying," continued Mrs. Opalsen, "I came up. I went to the drawer here,"—she indicated the bottom right hand drawer of the knee hole dressing-table,—"took out my jewel-case and unlocked it. It seemed quite as usual—but the pearls were not there!"

The inspector had been busy with his notebook.

"When had you last seen them?" he asked.

"They were there when I went down to dinner."

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure. I was uncertain whether to wear them or not, but in the end I decided on the emeralds, and put them back in the jewel-case."

"Who locked up the jewel-case?"

"I did. I wear the key on a chain round my neck." She held it up as she spoke.

The inspector examined it, and shrugged his shoulders.

"The thief must have had a duplicate key. No difficult matter. The lock is quite a simple one. What did you do after you'd locked the jewel-case?"

"I put it back in the bottom drawer, where I always keep it."

"You didn't lock the drawer?"

"No—I never do. My maid remains in the room till I come up, so there's no need."

The inspector's face grew graver.

"Am I to understand that the jewels were there when you went down to dinner, and that since then *the maid has not left the room?*"

SUDDENLY, as though the horror of her own situation for the first time burst upon her, Celestine uttered a piercing shriek, and flinging herself upon Poirot, poured out a torrent of incoherent French.

The suggestion was infamous! That she, Celestine, should be suspected of robbing Madame! The police were well known to be of a stupidity incredible! But Monsieur, who was a Frenchman himself, would not—

"A Belgian," interjected Poirot; but Celestine paid no attention to the correction.

Monsieur would not stand by and see her falsely accused, while that infamous chambermaid was allowed to go scot free! She, Celestine, had never liked her—a bold, red-faced thing, a born thief. She, Celestine, had said from the first that she was not honest! And had kept a sharp watch over her, too, when she was doing Madame's room! Let those idiots of policemen search her, and if they did not find Madame's pearls on her, it would be very surprising!

Although this harangue was uttered in rapid and virulent French, Celestine had interlarded it with a wealth of gesture, and the chambermaid realized at least a part of her meaning. She reddened angrily.

"If that foreign woman's saying I took the pearls, it's a lie," she declared heatedly. "I never so much as saw them."

"Search her," screamed the other. "You will find it is as I say."

"You're a liar, do you hear?" said the chambermaid, advancing upon her. "Stole 'em yourself, and want to put it on me. Why, I was only in the room about three minutes before the lady come up, and then you were sitting here the whole time as you always do—like a cat watching a mouse."

The inspector looked across inquiringly at Celestine. "Is that true? Didn't you leave the room at all?"

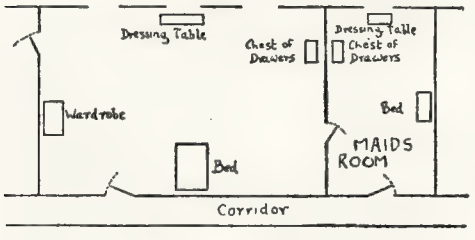
"I did not actually leave her alone," admitted Celestine reluctantly. "But I went into my own room through the door here twice—once to fetch a reel of cotton, and once for my scissors. She must have done it then."

"You wasn't gone a minute," retorted the chambermaid angrily. "Just popped out and in again! I'd be glad if the police *would* search me. *I've* nothing to be afraid of."

AT this moment there was a tap at the door. The inspector went to it. His face brightened when he saw who it was.

"Ah," he said, "that's rather fortunate! I sent for one of our female searchers, and she's just arrived. Perhaps if you wouldn't mind going into the room next door—" He looked at the chambermaid, who stepped across the threshold with a toss of her head, the searcher following close after her.

The French girl had sunk sobbing into a chair. Poirot was looking round the room, the main features of which I have made clear by a sketch—



"Where does that door lead?" he inquired, nodding his head toward the one by the window.

"Into the next apartment, I believe," said the inspector. "It's bolted, anyway, on this side."

Poirot walked across to it, tried it, then drew back the bolt and tried it again.

"And on the other side as well," he remarked. "Well, that seems to rule out that."

He walked over to the windows, examining each of them in turn.

"And again—nothing. Not even a balcony outside!"

"Even if there were," said the inspector impatiently, "I don't see how that would help us, if the maid never left the room."

"Evidement," said Poirot, not disconcerted. "As Mademoiselle is positive she did not leave the room—"

He was interrupted by the reappearance of the chambermaid and the police searcher.

"Nothing," said the latter laconically.

"I should hope not indeed!" said the chambermaid virtuously. "And that French hussy ought to be ashamed of herself taking away an honest girl's character!"

"There, there, my girl, that's all right!" said the inspector, opening the door. "Nobody suspects you. You go along and get on with your work."

The chambermaid went unwillingly.

"Going to search *her?"* she demanded, pointing at Celestine.

"Yes, yes." He shut the door on her and turned the key.

Celestine accompanied the searcher into the small room in her turn. A few minutes later she also returned. Nothing had been found on her.

The inspector's face grew graver.

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to come along with me all the same, miss." He turned to Mrs. Opalsen. "I'm sorry madam, but all the evidence points that way. If she's not got them on her, they're hidden somewhere about the room."

CELESTINE uttered a piercing shriek, and clung to Poirot's arm. The latter bent and whispered something in the girl's ear. She looked up at him doubtfully.

"Oui, oui, ma belle—I assure you it is better not to resist." Then he turned to the inspector.

"You permit, monsieur? A little experiment—purely for my own satisfaction."

"Depends on what it is," replied the police officer noncommittally.

Poirot addressed Celestine once more.

"You have told us that you went into your room to fetch a reel of cotton. Whereabouts was it?"

"On the top of the chest of drawers, monsieur."

"And the scissors, where were they?"

"There also."

"Would it be troubling you too much, mademoiselle, to ask you to repeat those two actions? You were sitting here with your work, you say?"

Celestine sat down, and then at a sign from Poirot, rose, passed into the adjoining room, took up an object from the chest of drawers, and returned.

Poirot divided his attention between her movements, and a large turnip of a watch which he held in the palm of his hand.

"Again, if you please, Mademoiselle."

At the conclusion of the second performance, he made a note in his book, and returned the watch to his pocket.

"Thank you, mademoiselle. And you, monsieur."

The inspector seemed somewhat entertained by this excessive politeness. Celestine departed in a flood of tears, accompanied by the woman from the police department, and the plain-clothes official.

THEN, with a brief apology to Mrs. Opalsen, the inspector set to work to ransack the room. He pulled out drawers, opened cupboards, completely unmade the bed, and tapped the floor. Mr. Opalsen looked on skeptically.

"You really think you will find them?"

"Yes sir. It stands to reason. She hadn't time to take them out of the room. The lady's discovering the robbery so soon upset her plans. No—they're here, right enough. One of the two must have hidden them—and it's very unlikely that the chambermaid did so."

"More than unlikely—impossible!" said Poirot quietly.

"Eh?" The inspector stared.

Poirot smiled modestly.

"I will demonstrate. Hastings, my good friend, take my watch in your hand—with care. It is a family heirloom! Just now I timed Mademoiselle's movements; her first absence from the room was of twelve seconds, her second of fifteen. Now observe my actions. Madame will have the kindness to give me the key of the jewel-case. I thank you. My friend Hastings will have the kindness to say 'Go.' "

"Go," I said.

With almost incredible swiftness Poirot wrenched open the drawer of the dressing-table, extracted the jewel-case, fitted the key in the lock, opened the case, selected a piece of jewelry, shut and locked the case, and returned it to the drawer which he pushed to again. His movements were like lightning.

"Well, *mon ami?*" he demanded of me breathlessly.

"Forty-six seconds," I replied.

"You see?" he looked round. "There would not have been time for the chambermaid even to take the necklace out—far less, hide it."

"Then that settles it on the maid," said the inspector with satisfaction, and returned to his search. He passed into the maid's bedroom next door.

POIROT was frowning thoughtfully. Suddenly he shot a question at Mr. Opalsen.

"This necklace—it was without doubt insured?"

Mr. Opalsen looked a trifle surprised at the question.

"Yes," he said hesitatingly. "That is so."

"But what does that matter?" broke in Mrs. Opalsen tearfully. "It's my necklace I want. It was unique. No money could be the same."

"I comprehend, madame," said Poirot soothingly. "I comprehend perfectly. To *la femme,* sentiment is everything, is it not so? But monsieur, who has not the so fine susceptibility, will doubtless find some slight consolation in the fact. Is that not so?"

"Of course, of course," said Mr. Opalsen, rather uncertainly. "Still—"

He was interrupted by a shout of triumph from the inspector. He came in, dangling something from his fingers. It was the pearl necklace.

With a cry, Mrs. Opalsen heaved herself up from her chair. She was a changed woman.

"Oh! Oh! My necklace!"

She clasped it to her breast with both hands. We crowded round.

"Where was it?" demanded Opalsen.

"Maid's bed. In among the springs of the wire mattress. She must have stolen it and hidden it there before the chambermaid arrived on the scene."

"You permit, madame?" said Poirot gently. He took the necklace from her and examined it closely, then handed it back with a bow.

"I'm afraid, madam, you'll have to hand it over to us for the time being," said the

inspector. "We shall want it for the charge. But it shall be returned to you as soon as possible."

Mr. Opalsen frowned.

"Is that necessary?"

"I'm afraid so, sir. Just a formality."

"Oh, let him take it, Ed," cried his wife. "I'd feel safer if he did. I shouldn't sleep a wink thinking some one else might try and get hold of it. That wretched girl! And I would never have believed it of her."

"There, there, my dear, don't take on so."

I felt a gentle pressure on my arm. It was Poirot.

"Shall we slip away, my friend? I think our services are no longer needed."

ONCE outside, however, he hesitated, and then, much to my surprise, he remarked:

"I should rather like to see the room next door."

The door was not locked, and we entered. The room, which was a large double one, was unoccupied. Dust lay about rather noticeably, and my sensitive friend gave a characteristic grimace as he ran his finger round a rectangular mark on a table near the window.

"The *service* leaves to be desired," he observed dryly.

He was staring thoughtfully out of the window, and seemed to have fallen into a brown study.

"Well?" I demanded impatiently. "What did we come in here for?"

He started.

"Je vous demande pardon, mon ami. I wished to see if the door were really bolted on this side also."

"Well," I said, glancing at the door which communicated with the room we had just left, "it *is* bolted."

Poirot nodded. He still seemed to be thinking.

"And anyway," I continued, "what does it matter? The case is over. I wish you'd had more chance of distinguishing yourself. But it was the kind of a case that even a stiff-backed idiot like that inspector couldn't go wrong over."

Poirot shook his head.

"The case is not over, my friend. It will not be over until we find out who stole the pearls."

"But the maid did!"

"Why do you say that?"

"Why," I stammered, "they were found actually in her mattress."

"Ha!" said Poirot impatiently. "Those were not the pearls."

"What?"

"Imitation, *mon ami.*"

THE statement took my breath away. Poirot was smiling placidly.

"The good inspector obviously knows nothing of jewels. But presently there will be a fine hullabaloo!"

"Come," I cried, dragging at his arm.

"Where?"

"We must tell the Opalsens at once."

"I think not."

"But that poor woman—"

"Eh bien, that poor woman, as you call her, will have a much better night believing the jewels to be safe."

"But the thief may escape with them!"

"As usual, my friend, you speak without reflection. How do you know that the pearls Mrs. Opalsen locked up so carefully tonight were not the false ones, and that the real robbery did not take place at a much earlier date?"

"Oh!" I said, bewildered.

"Exactly," said Poirot, beaming. "We start again."

HE led the way out of the room, paused a moment as though considering, and then walked down to the end of the corridor, stopping outside the small den where the chambermaids and valets of the respective floors congregated. Our particular chambermaid appeared to be holding a small court there, and to be retailing her late experiences to an appreciative audience. She stopped in the middle of a sentence. Poirot bowed with his usual politeness.

"Excuse that I derange you, but I shall be obliged if you will unlock for me the door of Mr. Opalsen's room."

The woman rose willingly, and we accompanied her down the passage again. Mr. Opalsen's room was on the other side of the corridor, its door facing that of his wife's room. The chambermaid unlocked it with her passkey, and we entered.

As she was about to depart, Poirot detained her.

"One moment—have you ever seen among the effects of Mr. Opalsen a card like this?"

He held out a plain white card, rather highly glazed and uncommon in appear-

ance. The maid took it and scrutinized it carefully.

"No sir, I can't say I have. But anyway, the valet has most to do with the gentlemen's rooms."

"I see. Thank you."

Poirot took back the card. The woman departed. Poirot appeared to reflect a little. Then he gave a short, sharp nod.

"Ring the bell, I pray of you, Hastings—three times, for the valet."

Devoured with curiosity, I obeyed. Meanwhile Poirot had emptied the contents of the waste-paper basket on the floor, and was swifty going through them.

In a few moments the valet answered the bell. To him Poirot put the same question, and handed him the card to examine. But the response was the same. The valet had never seen a card of that particular quality among Mr. Opalsen's belongings. Poirot thanked him, and he withdrew, somewhat unwillingly with an inquisitive glance at the overturned waste-basket and the litter on the floor. He could hardly have helped overhearing Poirot's thoughtful remark as he bundled the torn papers back again: "And the necklace was heavily insured—"

"Poirot," I cried. "I see!"

"You see nothing, my friend," he replied quickly. "As usual, nothing at all! It is incredible—but there it is. Let us return to our own apartments."

We did so in silence. Once there, to my intense surprise, Poirot effected a rapid change of clothing.

"I go to London tonight," he explained. "It is imperative."

"What?"

"Absolutely! The real work, that of the brain—ah, those brave little gray cells!—it is done. I go to seek the confirmation. I shall find it! Impossible to deceive Hercule Poirot!"

"You'll come a cropper one of these days," I observed, rather disgusted by his vanity.

"Do not be enraged, I beg of you, *mon ami.* I count on you to do me a service—of your friendship."

"Of course," I said eagerly, rather ashamed of my moroseness. "What is it?"

"The sleeve of my coat that I have taken off—will you brush it? See you—a little white powder has clung to it. You without doubt observed me run my finger round the drawer of the dressing-table?"

"No—I didn't."

"You should observe my actions, my friend. Thus I obtained the powder on my finger, and being a little overexcited, I rubbed it on my sleeve—an action without method which I deplore—false to all my principles!"

"But what was the powder?" I asked, not particularly interested in Poirot's principles.

"Not the poison of the Borgias," replied Poirot with a twinkle. "I see your imagination mounting. I should say it was French chalk."

"French chalk?"

"Yes, cabinetmakers use it to make drawers run smoothly."

I laughed.

"You old sinner, I thought you were working up to something exciting."

"*Au revoir,* my friend. I save myself! I fly!"

The door shut behind him. With a smile half of derision, half of affection, I picked up the coat, and stretched out my hand for the clothes-brush.*

THE next morning, hearing nothing from Poirot, I went out for a stroll, met some old friends, and lunched with them at their hotel. In the afternoon we went for a spin. A punctured tire delayed us, and it was past eight when I got back to the Grand Metropolitan.

The first sight that met my eyes was Poirot looking even more diminutive than usual, sandwiched between the Opalsens, who were beaming in a state of placid satisfaction.

"*Mon ami* Hastings!" he cried, and sprang to meet me. "Embrace me, my very good friend—all has marched to a marvel!"

Luckily the embrace was merely figurative—not a thing one is always sure of with Poirot.

"Just wonderful, I call it," said Mrs. Opalsen, smiling all over her fat face. "Didn't I tell you, Ed, that if he couldn't get back my pearls, nobody would?"

"You did, my dear, you did. And you were right."

I looked helplessly at Poirot, and he answered the glance.

"My friend Hastings is, as you say in England, all at the seaside. Seat yourself,

* It is suggested that the reader pause in his perusal of the story at this point, make his own solution of the mystery—and then see how close he comes to that of the author.—*The Editors.*

and I will recount to you all the affair that has so happily ended."

"Ended?"

"But yes. They have been arrested—"

"Who are arrested?"

"The chambermaid and the valet, *parbleu!* You did not suspect? Not with my parting hint about the French chalk?"

"You said cabinetmakers used it!"

"Certainly they do—to make drawers slide easily. Somebody wanted that drawer to slide in and out without any noise. Who could that be? Obviously only the chambermaid. The plan was so ingenious that it did not at once leap to the eye—not even to the eye of Hercule Poirot! Listen, this was how it was done:

"The valet was in the empty room next door, waiting. The French maid leaves the room. Quick as a flash, the chambermaid whips open the drawer, takes out the jewel-case, and slipping back the bolt, passes it through the door. The valet opens it at his leisure with the duplicate key with which he has provided himself, extracts the necklace, and awaits his time. Celestine leaves the room again, and *pst!* in a flash the case is passed back again and replaced in the drawer. Madame arrives; the theft is discovered. The chambermaid demands to be searched, with a good deal of righteous indignation, and leaves the room without a stain on her character. The imitation necklace with which they have provided themselves has been concealed in the French girl's bed that morning by the chambermaid—a master-stroke, eh?"

"But what did you go to London for?"

"You remember the card?"

"Certainly. It puzzled me—and puzzles me still. I thought—" I hesitated delicately, glancing at Mr. Opalsen.

"*Une blague!* For the benefit of the valet! The card was one with a specially prepared surface—for fingerprints. I went straight to Scotland Yard, asked for our old friend Inspector Japp, and laid the facts before him. As I had suspected, the fingerprints proved to be those of two well-known jewel-thieves who have been wanted for some time. Japp came down with me; the thieves were arrested; and the necklace was discovered in the valet's possession. A clever pair, but they failed in *method!* Have I not told you, Hastings, at least thirty-six times, that without method—"

"At least thirty-six thousand times," I interrupted. "But where did their method break down?"

"*Mon ami,* it is a good plan to take a place as chambermaid or valet—but you must not shirk your work. They left an empty room undusted, and therefore when the man put down the jewel-case on the little table near the communicating door, it left a square mark—"

"I remember," I cried.

"Before, I was undecided. Then—I *knew!*"

THERE was a moment's silence.

"And I've got my pearls," said Mrs. Opalsen as a sort of Greek chorus.

"Well," I said, "I'd better have some dinner."

Poirot accompanied me.

"This ought to mean *kudos* for you," I observed.

"*Pas du tout,*" replied Poirot tranquilly. "Japp and the local inspector will divide the credit between them. But,"—he tapped his pocket,—"I have a check here—from Mr. Opalsen, and, how say you, my friend? This week-end has not gone according to plan. Shall we return here next week-end, at my expense this time?"

"THE KING OF CLUBS," another of these ingenious stories of Hercule Poirot's exploits, will appear in the next, the November, issue of *The Blue Book Magazine.* With it you will find, "The Sands of Oro," a splendid novel of the South Seas by Beatrice Grimshaw; "The Blackmailers," a mystery novelette by Lemuel L. De Bra, with whose thrill-filled stories you are of course familiar; and many specially attractive contributions by Culpeper Zandtt, Courtney Ryley Cooper, Clarence Herbert New, Warren H. Miller, Austin Hall and other writers of clean, vigorous and quick-moving fiction.

Where Violets Grew

A joyous story of golf and sundry other amusing things, by a man with a real sense of humor—the author of "When Greek Meets Greek," "The Anthropoid Caddy" and other good ones.

By ELMER BROWN MASON

"AN easterly wind this time o' year mostly brings rain unless it's so cold that it snows," said Ephraim Lunt.

"But this wind's just a whisper—may die out," objected Samuel J. Wing.

"My nevvy, John Archer, is comin' today with the money that was left to get a billiard-table," Silas Winters announced proudly. "He's goin' to give it to me to dis-emburse."

The other two old men gazed at him resentfully. The possibilities of the east wind as a subject of conversation were far from exhausted. Besides, they all knew about John Archer and the money that had been willed for the purchase of a billiard-table. It had been mentioned at least three times a day for the last month.

"Then again, the east wind's just as liable to blow up hard and raise old Ned." Ephraim Lunt tried bravely again.

Thomas Sneed turned from the mournful contemplation of the thin spring sunshine outside, and addressed the company in bitter tones:

"If I hadn't turned over my forty thousand dollars to that there Archer Trust Company for to pay me four and a half per cent, I could have gone to visit my grand-niece in Californy. I writ 'em again last week to let me have some money, and they wouldn't do it."

"Supposing the east wind *does* get up?" interrogated Samuel J. Wing, but his voice lacked the necessary arrogance to sustain the subject.

Silence settled down on the nine old men.

"Wish them papers would come. They're late again," a fretful voice complained.

No one else had the energy to develop the grievance, however, and it died away, much as the wail of a gull is absorbed into the immensity of the sea.

The logs crackled cheerily in the huge fireplace of the big living-room, throwing into relief the letters of the inscription EVERET WILLIAMS HOME carved on the front of the oak mantelpiece, imparting a ruddy brilliance to the painting of the founder which hung above it.

The nine old men in the room gazed at

it vacantly. Perhaps some of them felt a vague thankfulness to the philanthropist whose gift of sixty thousand dollars, with its eccentric proviso, had made the Home possible. It is doubtful, however. They were proud old men. No single inmate of the Home had the slightest feeling of dependence on charity. Each paid twelve hundred dollars a year for the privilege of living there. The principal from which these incomes were derived was administered, for the most part, by the ultra-conservative Archer Trust Company, sole trustee for the Home itself. Indeed, the Everet Williams Home was the aristocrat of its kind.

THE door into the living-room opened, and Mrs. Bonner, the matron, plump, smiling and pleasingly forty, entered.

"Good morning, gentlemen," she greeted them. "I'm sorry the papers are late, but in future we'll send a messenger for them before breakfast. Is there anything any of you would like?"

"Yes, ma'am." Thomas Sneed rose to his feet and drew her aside. "I wish you'd use your influence to have the Trust Company let me go to Californy to visit my grand-niece. I've writ an' writ, an' they wont give me no money—my own money!"

"I'll speak to Mr. Archer when he comes to see Mr. Winters this morning," Mrs. Bonner answered briskly, and added: "It's a shame they wont let you have it."

" 'Taint that I couldn't get it from my half-brother, though I aint seen him for thirty year," the old man went on garrulously. "He's richer'n pie. But I wanta travel on my own money an' have 'nough to buy her a present besides. When she was little, she was just crazy 'bout anythin' pink, an' I aim to buy her the most 'spensive coral beads I kin get."

"That's a splendid idea," the matron agreed readily; then she addressed the entire assembly: "I had the croquet grounds rolled and the wickets set up. It's quite warm outside; if any of you gentlemen would care to play—"

"Me and Captain Brown will take on any two of ye—for two bits," Ephraim Lunt suggested eagerly. "What say, Silas? You and Bill?"

"Got to wait for my nevvy, John Archer, 'bout that billiard-table," Mr. Winters reminded him reproachfully.

"My rheumatiz is awful bad this morning," contributed Mr. William Rutz.

"What say, Tom? You and Frank?"

"I'm a-goin' to write that danged Trust Company ag'in," Mr. Sneed answered. Franklin DeGrout simply shook his head.

"What say, Ernest? You and Pop?"

"I don't wanta," Ernest Smith retorted ungraciously, then added maliciously: "Pop, he's eighty-one."

" 'Taint none of your business how old I be," snapped Mr. Philip Tait. "An' I want you to quit callin' me Pop. I'm younger at eighty-one than you be at sixty-eight, Ernest Smith, an' kin lick ye any day o' the week."

"Ye kin like hell," Smith retorted with simple directness.

"Now, now, gentlemen!" Mrs. Bonner protested in comfortable level tones. "Why don't you play with Mr. Tait, Mr. Sneed, against Mr. Lunt and Captain Brown, and leave your letter till this evening?"

"An' we'll lick 'em too, *if* they play fair," announced Pop with spirit. "You think I can't do nothin' 'cause I'm eighty-one! I'll show ye!" His expression changed suddenly; a shamefaced look distorted his wrinkles. "Ye'll have to 'scuse me a minute. I clean forgot to wash my teeth."

"Oh, Mr. Tait, and you promised me you'd do it before breakfast every morning!" Mrs. Bonner reproached him, but she smiled at the same time.

"I forgit," Pop mumbled, then brightened. "It's a 'vantage to have false teeth like some." And he glanced significantly at Smith as he left the room.

THE croquet players went out noisily, followed by all the others save Silas Winters, who waited for his nephew, and William Rutz, who toasted his rheumatism before the open fire.

The door from the hall opened, and Mr. John Archer, president of the Archer Trust Company, a middle-aged, pink-cheeked man in knickerbockers, entered the room. He deposited a bag of golf-clubs on the floor.

"Hello, Uncle Si," he called cheerily. "I brought you a check for the billiard-table. You're to buy it, you know."

"I don't want no check; I want cash," Silas Winters said disagreeably. "You put everything into that old bank of yours, Johnny. We don't hear nothing but the Archer Trust Company here from morning till night. I'm plumb tired of it."

"All right," agreed Archer pleasantly. "You indorse the check—here's the real thing." And he began to count down crisp bills on a table. "Three hundred dollars—that's right, isn't it?"

"Huh!" Mr. Winters assented ungraciously as he gathered up the money, and turned a critical eye upon his nephew. "What you dressed in them knee pants for, Johnny?"

"I'm playing golf this morning, Uncle Si."

"Aint you got nothing better to do with your time than that? Hadn't you ought to attend to your business? My money's 'vested in your bank, Johnny, so I got a right to know. Playing golf games in the *morning!* When I was your age, I 'tended to business. Men that didn't, that played games, diced and gambled and sich, was frowned on in *my* day."

"Thank heaven the Trust Company just about runs itself," Mr. Archer answered with imperturbable good humor, "and so I have time to chase this." He produced a golf-ball from his pocket and flipped it up into the air, catching it again as it fell.

"I didn't know you threw them white pills," Silas Winters said curiously. "I thought you hit 'em with one of them shinny-sticks." He nodded towards the golf bag. "Though I don't see why you have to have sich a lot of 'em."

"You do hit them. You use the sticks for different lies—that is, for different kinds of places where the ball falls. When you start, you build a tee of a little mound of sand for the ball, and hit it with this one." He crossed over to the bag and pulled out a driver. "If you get into long grass, you use an iron club. It cuts right through the grass, you see."

"Is it a good game?" his uncle asked cautiously.

"Best game in the world."

"Well, you aint no right to let it interfere with business, 'specially when you're taking care of my money," Silas announced, his momentary interest dying out.

"I don't. When they need me at the Trust Company, you'll find me right at my desk. When they don't, I look out for my health by playing—"

THE door opened, and a neat maid entered:

"Telephone from the Archer Trust Company for Mr. Archer. They want to know if he has forgotten that there's a directors' meeting this morning. They're waiting for him."

"My heavens, I *did* forget!" the man exclaimed. "Good-by, Uncle Si—I must run."

"Hear that, Bill?" Winters addressed the rheumatic William Rutz, as the door slammed behind Archer. "Don't believe my money's safe in his hands when he does sich. Don't believe he 'tends to business. I've a good mind— Say, Bill, he went and forgot his shinny-sticks and this ball! What do you think of that?"

"So he did!" cackled Mr. Rutz. "So he did. Aint that somethin', now! So he did. Aint that somethin'! Say, Si, what say if we take 'em outside an' hit at the ball? My rheumatiz is better now."

The two old gentlemen dragged the golf-bag out to the terrace. Winters pulled the driver from among the other clubs and waved it up and down.

"You oughta hit that ball a mile with this," he announced, and made a tremendous swipe at the little white sphere on the ground, which, however, lay quite still.

"You mind what you're doin'—you nigh bunged me with that there!" his companion warned. "Here, give *me* the shinny-stick."

"You'll hurt your rheumatiz," prophesied Winters, loath to surrender the driver.

"Seein' as it's *my* rheumatiz, I guess I got a right to hurt it if I mind to," came the prompt retort, and Rutz secured possession of the club. He made three unsuccessful swipes, then rested, his face contracted with a rheumatic twinge.

"You missed it, too," Winters stated with great satisfaction. "Oh, I see what's the trouble. Johnny Archer said you put the ball on somethin' he called a tee, a heap of sand."

"We aint got no sand," objected the other old man. "There aint even no loose dirt round." He gazed over the trim turf.

"Well, we gotta have sand. Stands to reason we can't hit that little ball 'less it's stuck up on somethin'. I know, Bill. You sneak round to the dining-room and get a sugar-bowl. Sugar's mostly sand, anyways."

"My rheumatiz 's bad ag'in."

"Your rheumatiz didn't keep you from swinging that shinny-stick like 'twas an ax-handle."

Mr. Rutz went.

FROM the croquet-grounds came the sound of strife—many voices talking at once, and above them all Pop's shrill treble: "He kicked it. I seen him. He kicked it, dang him!" The game broke up. The players and spectators streamed up onto the terrace. William Rutz hobbled out of the Home, a sugar-bowl in his hand.

"What yo'-all doin'?" demanded Captain Brown curiously.

"Playin' golf," Mr. Winters stated shortly, leaning down stiffly and building a tall white tee with handsful of sugar. "It's a Scotch game. It aint played down South."

"I've nevah seen a game played in the No'th that a So'therner could not play, suh," the Captain answered with dignity. "What are the principles involved? How do you play it?"

"That-a-way," Mr. Winters announced with deep satisfaction, watching the ball he had just hit soar away into the distance.

"Give me that bludgeon, suh," suggested the Tennesseean.

"There aint no more balls," Mr. Winters said, surrendering the driver.

"Yes, there be," piped up Mr. Rutz. "I've found a lot o' 'em in this little do-dad pocket on the side of the bag. You give me that shinny-stick, though. It's my turn."

"I don't quite see the object of the game, suh," Captain Brown gave up the stick. "Does the gentleman win who sends the ball the farthest?"

"Guess so," Mr. Winters assented doubtfully.

William Rutz got off a drive at the third attempt. Then another accolyte tried his luck. There were fourteen balls in the bag. They were soon scattered all over the landscape, and the gardener's boy was pressed into service to pick them up.

"There ain't no point to this here game," Pop piped up suddenly, "an' I don't believe you know nothin' 'bout it nohow."

"If you will permit me," suggested Franklin DeGrout, "I can tell you a little more about the game. There should be a small hole in which you endeavor to put the ball—several holes called a links. The one who makes the most holes in the lowest number of strokes wins."

"I have it, gentlemen," Captain Brown announced. "We will look up this spo't in Hoyle, the accepted authority on all ca'd questions."

"I don't believe there'll be anything about it in that book—it's only card-games," came from a doubter.

"An authority on pokeh is an authority on every subject, suh," the Tennesseean stated coldly.

TWO weeks passed. John Archer had been in New York on business ever since the directors' meeting. Francis Lemont, his efficient secretary, sat at his desk, which he had reduced from the disorder in which it had been left to a methodical neatness. He pursed his lips over the letter he was reading:

DEAR FRANCIS:

Hope to be back at the end of the week. Shot an eighty-five over the Ardsley course with borrowed clubs. Wish you would get mine, which I left at the Home when you telephoned me for that last directors' meeting and then sent me out here. If you don't get them soon, they are likely to be busted by the old gentlemen, who are quite capable of using them to bat around croquet-balls. Take a look at the new billiard-table while you are there, and see if it is all right. Also please go over the bills and the end-of-the-month reports from the Home, and do whatever is necessary.

I'm off to Glen Ridge to try a new course.

Hastily,

JOHN ARCHER.

P. S. Better send me on my clubs by parcel post insured. J. A.

The capable secretary laid the letter down, his lips still pursed in criticism. He did not approve of golf. The Everet Williams Home took too much of the president's time, he thought; and he considered it incompatible with his own dignity to retrieve forgotten golf-clubs and inspect billiard-tables—of which he knew nothing. Also he knew that John Archer had given this billiard-table himself, going through the unnecessary subterfuge of pretending that the money had been left the Home for that purpose. Nevertheless, since he *was* an efficient secretary, he prepared to obey his employer. He would motor out to the Home after dinner, thus securing a little fresh air at the same time. His plans made, he touched a button and asked the clerk who answered it, for the monthly report.

Here again was cause for disapproval. Food-bills on the Home were eighty-nine dollars larger than the previous month. There was a bill for replacing five broken windows and the entire side of the greenhouse. Nor was this all. The report of

the Home's physician, who made semi-monthly examinations of all the old men, was most disconcerting:

> Every inmate complains of painful stiffness in the joints—symptoms that I am at a loss to account for save on the grounds of dampness in the building. I found the living-room windows open, when I called, but a large fire burning. This could hardly be the cause of such a general complaint, however.
>
> I strongly recommend an immediate and careful inspection of the heating-plant.
>
> There are no functional disorders, and a general gain in weight, very surprising under the circumstances.
>
> The grippe-cold, so prevalent at present, has not yet appeared among the inmates of the Home.

" 'CORDING to this here plan for the links we have drawed," Silas Winters said judicially, "we can end where we begin. Addin' up all the distances between the holes, we got thirty-three hundred and eighty yards. If we put to that ten per cent for depreciation and upkeep—meanin' the walkin' from one green to the next, and chasin' balls which didn't go straight—we got thirty-seven hundred and eighteen yards—say two miles and a quarter, to be safe."

"That aint fur," promptly challenged Pop Tait.

"When the othah fo' holes are laid out, an' we're playin' all the time, it will ha'dly seem so far as walkin' back from the fifth hole now,' contributed Captain Brown.

" 'Bout them four holes?" interrogated Mr. Lunt. "The gardner's boy oughta get the tomato cans sunk in the ground tomorrow so we can play 'em. We can fix the bunkers later."

"So he kin," agreed Pop, then turned to Mr. Winters and added accusingly: "When you goin' to buy them rods to mark the holes, an' some more shinny-sticks? These here aint enough, by a dang sight." He patted John Archer's golf-bag, which he held between his knees.

"Well now, well now," Silas Winters marked time unhappily, "it's this-a-way: That there three hundred dollars was willed for to buy a billiard-table and give to me to dis-emburse for sich."

"Well, ye aint done it, hev ye? Ye aint done no dis-embursin' 'tall," snapped Pop Tait. "Stands ter reason, then, that some one else oughta hev the handlin' of that there funds, an' I move an' second that *I* be that there some one. Then I'll guarantee we'll hev all the didoes for this here golf-game—which some I aint namin' is too dang snug ter buy!"

"But it aint what you'd call honest," protested Silas Winters.

"You be only seventy-one," Pop informed him patronizingly. "When you git into the eighties like me, you'll think less 'bout honesty an' more 'bout justice—which is what's wrong with the world today," he added darkly.

"Well, I dunno," admitted Mr. Winters weakly, "I dunno. Say,"—his tone changed,—"here comes that there young feller in a closed car who does all his work for Johnny Archer whilst he plays golf."

"Do yo' reckon he's come fo' Mr. Archer's clubs?" interrogated Captain Brown in panic-stricken tones.

"It would not cause me the slightest surprise if he had," Franklin DeGrout put in.

"Well, he don't git 'em. I'll hide 'em," Pop stated emphatically, looking about him wildly.

"Aint no place to hide 'em," spoke up another old man.

"Yes, there be," Pop answered, moving over to a broad couch. "I'll lay on 'em." And he placed them beneath him and drew a rug over the couch. "If he comes ter bother me, you tell him I got smallpox an' I'm sleepin' it off."

THERE was the murmur of voices outside, the voice of Mr. Lemont, of Mrs. Bonner. They spoke at length, and the nine old men waited breathlessly. The only sound in the room was the whipping of a curtain at an open window, the purring of the logs burning in the fireplace.

"Don't fergit—smallpox," hissed Pop in a tense whisper.

The door opened. Mrs. Bonner entered, Mr. Lemont following.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he greeted them in the throaty tenor of embarrassment. "I trust you are all well."

His eyes caught Silas Winters', who looked away guiltily, cleared his throat and spoke.

"Yes, yes, we are," he said hastily, then corrected himself: " 'Cept Pop, who's got —er—measles."

"Measles?" interrogated Mr. Lemont in horrified tones.

" 'Taint measles, you ijiot; it's smallpox," the old man on the couch announced wrathfully.

"Smallpox!" gasped Mr. Lemont and looked to Mrs. Bonner. She shook her head at him, smiling. For a moment he stared at her; then his face cleared.

"Oh, I see," he said in relieved tones. "Well, I hope you'll be better in the morning." He sneezed with sudden violence.

"You bet I'll be better," squeaked Pop.

Mr. Lemont sneezed again and turned to the matron:

"Isn't it a bit chilly in here for these gentlemen? My heavens—every window is open!"

"An' they will remain open, suh," Captain Brown stated majestically. "It's a wa'm night. Besides, there's less dangah of infection from Mr. Tait's malady with plenty of ventilation."

"To be sure, to be sure!" the secretary agreed dazedly. "Mrs. Bonner, before it slips my mind, Mr. Archer left his golf-clubs here and commissioned me to recover them."

"You don't see 'em no place, do ye?" snapped Pop from the couch. "No, ye don't. Then they aint here, be they? No, they aint."

"Has something happened to them?"

"There was some ladies from the Y. W. C. A. here today," Mr. Sneed said darkly.

"They was husky-lookin' women," Mr. Wing contributed.

"Had thick ankles, atherletic-like," Ernest Smith put in. "Looked like they played golf."

"They must hev took 'em," Mr. Rutz affirmed. "Now, aint that somethin'! Aint that somethin', now!"

Mr. Lemont looked helplessly from one old man to another as this dialogue proceeded.

"Well, I'm sure they'll turn up," he said finally, then glanced down at the slip of paper in his hand, and added: "I should like to see the new billiard-table. Mr. Archer suggested that I look at it."

"I aint bought it yet," Silas Winters stated hurriedly. "There aint no hurry when the weather is this nice outdoors. Who wants to fool round a billiard-table when the weather's so seasonable? This money was give to me to dis-emburse. I'm goin' to do it keerful."

"I'll say you'll dis-emburse it keerful, yes, you will," cackled Pop from the couch. "I'll see you do, personal. Say, it's hot in here, an' my smallpox's gettin' worse. Open 'nother winder—open all the winders—an' the door."

SEVEN sunburned and hearty old men sat on the benches in front of the Everet Williams Home. Just below the terrace was a carefully rolled green. A steel rod with a red disk on top indicated, by a large white figure in its center, that this was the ninth hole. Pop Tait and Si Winters had just finished a round, the former winning by one up.

"You do have the dangest luck," Si stated disgruntledly.

"Luck, nothin'," objected the octogenarian. " 'Taint luck—it's good playin' beat ye, an' ye oughta be man 'nough to own up."

"You did play mighty well," Mr. Winters admitted grudgingly.

"I mistrust I hadn't oughta took that billiard-money for golf fixings," Si Winters said dolefully. "I don't know what Johnny Archer'll say to me when he comes back."

"He wont say nothin'. He plays golf, don't he? Yes, he does. Then he'll understand, wont he? Yes, he will," Pop retorted with spirit.

"Here comes Frank and Bill." Mr. Winters changed the subject as a ball rolled neatly up onto the green. The other ball fell short. Franklin DeGrout missed his putt. William Rutz made a beautiful approach, then holed out when his opponent rimmed the cup.

"Seventy-two!" he shouted exultantly. "Breaks the record!"

"TELEGRAM for Mr. Sneed," Mrs. Bonner said, coming out onto the terrace and beaming on all of them.

The eight other old men watched with silent curiosity while the yellow envelope was torn open, spectacles adjusted and the telegram read. As Mr. Sneed's eyes traveled along the lines, his mouth opened gradually until, at the end, it gaped. He shut it with a click and read the message again. Suddenly tears began to flow down his face.

"What is it, Tom?" Pop demanded unhappily. "If it's bad news, 'taint probably so."

"I been left two hundred thousand dollars in cash," sobbed Mr. Sneed.

"Holy mack'rel, that aint nothin' to blubber over!" exclaimed Pop in exasperated tones.

"But my half-brother had to die to do it. An'—an' I can't 'member how he looked—an'—an' we used to fight somethin' awful!"

"Well, now! Well, now!" Pop said.

"That aint the wors' of it," Mr. Sneed continued lachrymosely. "Now I got all that money, mebbe they wont let me stay here! Mebbe they'll send me 'way before the tournament next month!"

"Dry yo' teahs, suh, though they do credit to yo' kind heart," suggested Captain Brown hurriedly. "Heah comes Mr. Lemont from the Trust Company."

THE secretary was evidently badly disturbed. The sight of the nine old men in sweaters and miscellaneous golf-clothes did not help to restore his equilibrium. Indeed, he stared at them much as though they were so many strange animals.

"Now I see!" he stated suddenly. "Now I see! There are trees cut down, heaps of turf and stones about; one pleasant dell has been filled with water, flooded, and holes, *holes*, everywhere! You've been playing golf!" He shot out the last sentence as a deadly accusation.

" 'Course we been playin' golf," Pop answered promptly in disagreeable tones. "Think we was diggin' for treasures in them holes? No, you don't. Them holes are hazards, consarn 'em! Yes, they be!"

"But—but there's nothing in the rules of the Everet Williams Home that provides for a golf course. Indeed there isn't. You—you are too old for such childish performances."

"There aint nothin' that provides fer knittin', be there? No, there bean't," Pop stated acrimoniously. "You wouldn't complain if you found us all knittin', would ye? No, ye wouldn't."

"Of course I shouldn't," admitted Mr. Lemont. "You took the words out of my mouth. But golf! The Home physician has not recommended it. The grounds are all torn up. It must stop—really, it must. What can I say to Mr. Archer? Haven't you croquet, and a billiard-table?"

"No, we aint got no billiard-table," Pop squeaked angrily, in disobedience to the frantic signs for silence that Si Winters was making. "Yes, I see you, Si. 'Taint your fault I took the billiard-money an' spent it on golf didoes. It was our money. Guess we had a right to spend it as we pleased. Yes, we had."

"I'll pay back the hull three hundred dollars if ye want it," broke in Mr. Sneed. "I got plenty o' money, I hev."

"I shall send the Home physician down to examine every one of you at once, and —and a psychopathic as well." The secretary looked sternly at Mr. Sneed. "The holes must be filled up, the grounds restored to their accustomed condition. That is all, gentlemen." And he turned and went down the steps.

"Like hell they must be! No, they mustn't," Pop shouted after him, but the old man's voice shook.

Silently the inmates of the Everet Williams Home gazed at one another, silently and mournfully. They were used to rules and regulations, accustomed to obey. Mr. Rutz was the first to speak:

"An' I know I could hev bettered that seventy-two!"

"I made the fifth hole in four, yes'day," said Mr. Sneed, and began to sob.

"There! There!" comforted Si Winters. "It will all come out right. I'll see my nevvy, Johnny Archer, an' he'll leave us mebbe a couple of holes to play."

"I don't want a couple o' holes; I want all nine o' 'em," Pop broke out passionately. "I guess I know what I want, don't I? Yes, I do. I—say, can't nothin' be done?"

"I don't wanta be sent way from you fellers," mourned Sneed. "I'd—I'd give that danged two hundred thousand dollars not to be sent away."

"I feah even so la'ge a sum as you mention will not he'p," Captain Brown said sadly. "We must abide by the rules."

"It wont, hey!" came Ernest Smith's voice. "It wont, hey! Don't you 'member the foundin' articles o' this Home? Say, listen to me." And he began to speak rapidly and excitedly.

"MORNIN', Francis," Mr. John Archer greeted his secretary curtly. He had been away for two months, hadn't shot a decent thirty-six holes for the last six weeks, and the neat piles of letters and documents on his desk affected him disagreeably.

"Good morning, sir. I trust your trip was successful?"

"Oh, yes," the president of the Trust Company said indifferently, then twisted around in his swivel chair. "For heavens' sake, why didn't you send me my clubs, Francis? I made a holy show of myself the last twenty times I played."

"I couldn't locate them, sir."

"What do you mean? Didn't I write you that I had left them at the Home?"

"Yes sir, but the inmates—in a body—claimed that they had been stolen."

"Stolen! Who'd steal golf-clubs in the Home! What's the matter with you, Francis?"

"Well, it's this way," the secretary explained desperately: "They told me some Y. W. C. A. women visited the Home, and that, being expert golfers, they stole the clubs. Not that I believe it for a moment. They are using them themselves."

"Not to bat around croquet-balls?" Mr. Archer turned all the way around and regarded his secretary sternly.

"Come, now," he said. "You aren't going to tell me that all those old fellows are playing golf? Why, several are over eighty years old. They can't all have gone crazy."

"I don't think any of them are quite right mentally," Francis Lemont said mournfully. "I found all the grounds torn up when I went there last, and made into one of those ridiculous golf-courses. They had taken the money you gave them for a billiard-table and spent it on golf accessories. I told them that such nonsense must cease at once and the grounds be restored. They—they were impertinent to me. Then I sent out a gang of men to repair the damage, and that old Southerner met them with a pistol and ordered them off the grounds. The foreman said he wasn't afraid of the pistol, but another old man reviled him so violently that he—the foreman, I mean—said that he'd be—er—damned if he went back—said he wouldn't be called such names. So I thought it best to let the matter rest until your return, sir."

"Oh!" ejaculated John Archer, then again: "Oh! That virulent old man was unquestionably Pop Tait. He has a fine flow of language. In passing, I might call your attention to the fact, Francis, that a golf-course is *never* ridiculous. It may be a poor course, but it can never be ridiculous. Hum! Very sporting lot of old fellows. The grounds are badly torn up, you say?"

"Frightfully," the secretary answered. "Trees cut down, piles of stones and turf everywhere, holes and ditches dug about with no apparent purpose but pure vandalism. A sunny glade where violets grew has been flooded."

"Where violets grew!" repeated Archer testily. "Where violets grew! What have violets to do with golf, Francis? Violets indeed! Let me see? Yes, that must be the water-hazard. How many holes have they?"

"I should say there were about a hundred."

"No, *no!* I mean how many holes are there to the course?"

"There are holes and ditches everywhere, as I told you, sir."

The president regarded the secretary pityingly and gave up the question.

"But—but, sir," sputtered Francis Lemont eagerly, "a most remarkable, a most providential solution to the whole difficulty has presented itself. Look at the top letter on your desk, sir. Yes, it's really providential."

THE president of the Archer Trust Company turned back to his desk and picked up a long envelope that topped the pile of correspondence. He drew out a typed sheet with something attached to it by a paper-clip. This he stared at uncomprehendingly while the secretary stood behind him, rubbing his hands together with pleasure.

"Check for a hundred and twenty thousand dollars!" the president gasped. "What does it mean?" and he began to read the letter.

Mr. John Archer,
President Archer Trust Company.
Dear Sir:

Enclosed you will find cashier's check for one hundred and twenty thousand dollars ($120,000.00).

Quoting from the second paragraph of the deed of trust executed by the late Everet Williams for the establishment of the Everet Williams Home:

"In order that the Everet Williams Home may exist in perpetuity, it is further made a condition of this deed of trust that the property be sold to whomsoever, at any time, offers twice the original cost of the property, namely one hundred and twenty thousand dollars ($120,000.00), and that the Home be rebuilt on cheaper real estate, etc."

In pursuance of this provision, we herewith tender our check.

Will you kindly have the papers drawn to pass title to The O. T. G. C., a corporation formed under the laws of this State?

Very respectfully,
WINK, JONES & VAN ZANDT,
By Daniel Wink,
Senior Partner.

"Providential, I call it, yes indeed," Francis Lemont said as his employer laid down the letter. "Puts an end to this golf nonsense without causing us the slightest embarrassment."

"You don't play golf, do you?" Mr. Archer asked in an oddly stifled voice.

"No sir," the secretary answered politely, "though I have no doubt that there isn't the least harm in it," he added hastily.

"I assure you that there isn't." The president's voice was acid. "Do you realize, Lemont, that what you call providential means that those nine splendid old men are to leave the place where they expected to spend the rest of their lives? Do you realize that they must give up this golf-course which they themselves have created? The place where violets grew! Ugh! And you call it providential! Why, it's an outrage, a burning outrage! I'm going out to the Home now. You take care of that stuff on my desk. And let me find it clean when I come back. Clean, you understand!"

IT was noon, however, when John Archer's car drew up at the Everet Williams Home, and the president got out and came slowly up the steps. He hated the duty before him, hated it worse than anything he had ever been called upon to do in his life. And the scene on the terrace only served to increase his sadness.

The morning round was just over, and the nine old men were clustered around a huge packing-case from which they were drawing out golf-clubs of every conceivable kind. Another longer case, close by, was being opened by two Italian workmen and the gardener's boy.

"This here must be one of them goose-neck putters," Si Winters said with great satisfaction, taking his stance and marking with a squinting eye, the course of the imaginary ball he had hit.

"You need somethin' ter help your puttin'," Pop commented promptly. "Say, will ye just heft this brassie! Aint it a lu-lu? Yes, 'tis."

"That's one of them real Scotch clubs we're going to give to Johnny Archer for them we stole off him," Si Winters said, holding out his hand for the stick, "Say—Why, there's Johnny Archer now! Come on up, Johnny, come on up! We stole your shinny-sticks, but we're giving you the best we could buy. Yours are mostly broke, and we got up a subscription."

"Good Lord! *How* can I tell them that they have to be moved away from here?" John Archer asked himself unhappily; but aloud he spoke cheerily. "Well! Well! Well! This is splendid. You're going to have a better course than this one, too."

"Don't want no better course," piped up Pop proudly. "Aint no better course, be there, fellas? No, there aint."

"Will you all come into the Home," Archer said unhappily. "I have something to communicate to you. I do hope you wont take it too hard. It really means nothing. Just a temporary inconvenience."

"We don't want no temporary inconvenience; we're too busy with our tournament which begins termorrer," stated William Rutz. "Inconvenience when the tournament's just comin' on! Aint that somethin', now! Well, I guess not!"

In the big living-room the old men found seats, but the president of the Archer Trust Company remained standing. He opened his mouth and gulped, could not find words. From outside came the sound of hammering, the buzz of insects in the hot sunlight.

"GENTLEMEN," he began, finding his voice with difficulty, "I'm sorry to say that under the terms of the Everet Williams Trust the Home must be sold—a hundred and twenty thousand dollars has been offered for it. It has been bought by a corporation, the O. T. G. C., I believe it calls itself. . . . . Why—why, what's the matter? I don't understand." And he gazed in amazement at the nine old men, who were rocking back and forth doubled up with laughter.

"Ye aint heard 'bout Tom's half-brother, which he aint seen for thirty year an' used to quarrel with awful?" interrogated William Rutz. "He left him—"

"Come on out here," cackled Pop Tait. "You come on out here, wont ye? Yes, ye will." And the octogenarian seized John Archer by the hand and dragged him to the terrace.

"But—but—" objected the president of the Trust Company; then he looked where Pop Tait was pointing.

The gardener's boy had just driven the last nail that fastened a large sign to the front of the erstwhile Everet Williams Home. The sign read:

THE OLD TIMERS' GOLF CLUB

Fatima and the Germanees

Heroic adventure in that strange land Africa is here tellingly described by a man who knows whereof he writes.

By WILLIAM ASHLEY ANDERSON

AFTER Tabora had been captured and the railroad line from Lake Tanganyika to the ocean fell into our hands, a German column broke through our screen and headed toward Nairobi, in British East Africa. Its object was to create a diversion that would draw the bulk of our forces back to protect our bases and lines of communication.

Van Deventer, being a Boer, understood this sort of strategy perfectly; and he let the Germans run wild, with a flying column hanging on their heels to harry them as they ravaged the country. While the Germans had the chance, they raised hell within our territory, scaring our depot chiefs into fevers, capturing the astounded commanders of ammunition-trains and blowing up their material, and so thoroughly infuriating the natives of certain districts that no stranger, white or black, was safe among them without an armed force at his back.

The British flying column finally caught up with the Germans, broke them up into three forces, and then began to hunt them in detail. This happened along the great rift that rips through German East Africa from Kilimanjaro to Tanganyika.

The force to which I was attached had been marching hard, and was worn pretty fine; but we finally caught our quarry in a corner. The Germans had their choice of a thorny desert behind them, a trackless primeval forest to the left, an impassable salt lake to the right, and disaster from our force in front of them. Only one possibility of escape lay open, and that was by skirting the lake and retreating along its west shore. This obscure trail meant a three-day march across a waterless tract. Nevertheless it lay open; and the O. C. decided immediately to send a patrol around the south end of the lake and close the exit.

I got the job, and started off through an unmapped wilderness with sixty men and only one day's meager rations. It took us a week to make our objective, marching through the bush over twenty miles a day, killing game for food when I dared risk a shot that would not betray us. We ran into a village where the *sultani* gave us wild honey, peanuts and a few mealies,

but this was all that broke the monotony of tough fresh meat and salt-dredged *biltong*.

On reaching the village of Kitanga, my first duty was to spread the news thoroughly that a large British force lay astride the trail, then double back on my tracks and rejoin the main force as reinforcements in time for the attack. But I had another duty of almost greater importance.

THIS was one of the districts that had been thoroughly ravaged. The Germans had robbed the natives of supplies, and maltreated them; and the *askaris* had induced many of the women to go off with them. The natives were sullen and furious. They hated all white men without distinction. It was therefore imperatively necessary for me to pacify them, to convince them absolutely of the good intentions of the British, and once more to gain their friendly support. Above all things my *askaris* had to keep clear of the women!

Fortunately, mine was strictly a fighting *safari*. No woman could accompany it under any circumstance, for there was not an hour during our little expedition that we were not in actual danger from one cause or another. Nevertheless I turned my back on Katinga with a breath of relief, for my men were a hard-bitten lot and rather enjoyed taking chances.

The *sultani* loaned me a number of scouts, and a *kilongozi* to guide me over a shorter route than the one I had followed to his village.

The first day we came to the edge of a deep scrub forest, scoured by marshy streams, which stretched away to the ridge of highlands about twenty miles away. This forest hummed with malarial mosquitoes at night, and the faint, elusive trail made extremely difficult going; but in daylight it was infested with tsetse fly, and sleeping sickness was endemic in the district. I decided, therefore, to march at night.

That was a hard march. We trusted entirely to the *kilongozi*, who drifted like a vague shadow before me, giving me the feeling that if I lost sight of him for an instant, I'd stumble blindly into a chasm or find myself sinking suddenly into some crawling morass. My eyes ached, straining in the darkness. The single file of men, in stained tatters of khaki, with bedraggled plumes of ostrich stuck in their kinky hair, blended perfectly with the shadows. Sometimes, glancing about, and seeing nothing but blackness, I'd be panicked into thinking I had been lost at an unexpected turn, only to be brought back again by the sound of breathing behind my neck. A scout hanging in a tree-top could hardly have told that men were passing, except for a faint shuffling of feet, like the rustle of leaves.

Even this sound was drowned by the unexpected noises of wild beasts—the hoarse, short barking of a herd of zebra, startled, and crashing with sudden uproar through the bush; the magnificent, throbbing, explosive belch of a well-fed lion, and the very similar roar of ostriches that made us feel that the bush and open glades swarmed with lions; the trembling ghoulish moan of a hyena; the rasping racket of cicadas.

Once I stepped on a soft, squirming something that sent me rocketing in the air; and once a mass of shadow on my left came to life and charged into us. Our line melted before the charging fool, and the rhino barged into us again, then went blundering away into the darkness with a whistling snort. After this experience I drew the men together, then stood by with the Nubian sergeant-major, Mohammed bin Nasur, and checked up one by one as they passed before us. As the little rear-guard drifted by us, Mohammed said decisively:

"All correct, *effendi*."

So I caught up with the *kilongozi*, cursing and stumbling through thorn-bushes and over rocks. The column kept closed up as tightly as possible. No man dared straggle. I was myself marching with difficulty, because my leg was poisoned from a small wound, and the dust from the game-trail had caked over the sores, making them stiff and painful; yet I think I'd rather have shot myself than lag behind along that dark trail alone.

In the gray of the false dawn a spear missed my head by less than a yard, and we had to halt to make friends with savages who thought they were taking a private revenge on a German patrol.

AT sunrise we made the base of the highlands. Climbing painfully up a rocky defile to the ridge, we bivouacked by a pool of water. Exhausted, I slept until afternoon.

My orderly, Sidi, should have awakened me sooner, but fatigue or hardship

seemed to have sapped his strength. Sidi was an excellent *askari*, classified on the rolls as a Swahili. He had been a German *askari* captured early in the war; and after a year in a military prison he had offered to join our forces, on the principle that governs tribal warfare that the best chief is the victorious chief. He was faithful, courageous, neat, and smart—a good soldier; and as my orderly he was supposed to set an example for the other *askaris*. To be made my orderly was to have the seal of my absolute approval put upon a man's military character.

During the night's march, however, Sidi had not been near me, and throughout the morning I had the uncomfortable impression that he had been deliberately shirking. I saw little of him. Now, as I looked about the simple camp and got the men together, all at once I discovered him hanging about the bivouac of the rear-guard.

Crouching beside him, strapping up his haversack, was a strange woman!

Well, it's useless to explain how I felt. Here was my orderly, my most trusted personal attendant, the only one of the entire troop who had dared to break the strictest order that had ever been given them. Presuming on immunity, he had imperiled the entire force!

My rage flamed up, and I only kept my self-possession with an effort. Preparations for departure had been completed. The *askaris* were all standing, looking at me with fixed expressions. They were good soldiers, and loyal; but they had been recruited from tribes of cattle-thieves, *shenzi* savages and former German *askaris*. In a district where anarchy had prevailed, and the primitive social fabric had been almost shattered, so that women were to be had for the asking, and intoxicating *pombe* was almost as easily procured as water, defiance of discipline might easily end in disaster.

The woman, feeling the moment's tension, turned her head and glanced at me casually over her shoulder, with an air of confidence.

THIS bit of Africa has for centuries been the frontier between the great tides of migration, the Hamites from the north, the Bantus from the south; and the remnants of strange tribes mill about these highlands. Some are pale and handsome; some squat and hairy and of an almost bestial primitiveness. This woman was of an advanced race. She was chocolate color, good-looking, with a fine carriage and a beautiful figure such as white women seldom possess. Her eyes were intelligent, her features well molded; her costume was a petticoat of kidskin neatly worked in blue and brown beads, and a double necklace of cowries.

I called the sergeant-major, and held *mukhtaub* on the spot.

"Mohammed," I asked, "did you know this woman was in camp?"

"Yes, *effendi*."

"What!" I cried out. "By God, Mohammed, who is commander here—you or I? You knew my orders; you knew this woman was in camp. Have you suddenly become the *bwana*, and I nothing but a miserable serving-boy to follow you? Am I a dog to be kicked by my own men? Am I a dog—"

Mohammed bin Nasur was a lanky man, well over six feet in height, with a powerful and enduring frame, the color of natural ebony, with black eyes sunk into the blackness of an immobile face. He would never look me in the eye. In ordinary conversation his manner of speaking to me was deprecatory; but officially it was terse, rapid and forceful. He was a man of powerful emotions and violent temper, which he restrained under the control of extraordinary will-power. Eight months before, he had come to me for leave to Somaliland to kill a man who had offended his honor. Yet I had always felt that anywhere in Africa I would have given my life into his keeping.

"*Effendi*," he exclaimed vehemently, "this man is your own orderly! He is not under my command!"

HE was right. I called Sidi and my orderly stood erect and smart before me, looking straight into my eyes, but moistening his lips with his tongue until I told him to speak.

"*Effendi*," he explained in a torrent of nervous speech, holding his hands to his sides with difficulty, "this woman is my wife. That is the truth, *effendi*. Her name is Fatima—Fatima binti Muslim. By God, this is the whole truth, *effendi!* When I became an *askari* with the Germanees, I left her behind. I have not seen her for many months—for many years. She has lived in the house of my father here in this village—Kitanga. Two days ago she recognized me. May God

wither my tongue, *effendi,* if I am not speaking the truth! It was written. What could I do? At such times words have no power. My heart could not deny her, and last night she followed us in the dark—"

"She followed us alone—without protection?"

"Yes, *effendi.*"

"Is this true, Mohammed?"

"True."

Unguarded, half-naked, risking the most horrible dangers, she had followed us in the dark alone through that murderous forest! My anger simmered down, and as I thought of what she had been through, I was willing to sacrifice a great deal to let her remain with us. In fact, if the matter had come up before we left Kitanga, I might have come to an understanding with the *sultani.* Now it was too late.

SIDI had acted in flagrant defiance of orders. There was not a man in the outfit who did not understand the full significance of his conduct. All stood watching with blank faces to see what I would do. I had no choice. I said to Fatima, without any display of emotion:

"Well, you have heard this *shauri.* You know that a law has been broken. The fault is yours. You know that Sidi is an *askari.* Had he done this while serving the Germans, he would have been shot. But I believe the fault is yours. Already you have delayed the march. This is what I will do:

"I will leave two of the *sultani's* warriors with you to take you back to Kitanga. If you go to the political officer at Mendala with a paper which I will give you, he will make all necessary arrangements for you to be sent to Dar-es-Salaam. There, if God wills, you may rejoin Sidi. But now you *must* return. As for Sidi, that is a different matter; he has disobeyed. Go; your *shauri* is finished."

Sidi was given five lashes.

Lying down, with his cap thrust in his mouth and his face buried in the crook of his arm, he took the five bruising slashes of the hippo-hide *kiboko* on the bare buttocks without a whimper. Fatima gave only a little plaintive cry, looking at him with large eyes and parted lips.

The strokes were administered by the sergeant-major. Mohammed's black countenance showed not a flicker of emotion as the rawhide swung from above his head with the full-arm swing of a saber stroke, raising bursting welts on the brown flesh.

When it was over, Sidi rose and saluted.

"You are no longer my orderly," I said. To Fatima I added vehemently: "You know that this is only slight punishment. If you are responsible for more, it will be worse—and *worse!*"

The *askaris* slipped away into the thornbush, leaving Fatima and her two guardians—warriors of a tribe that protects women—sitting on a boulder looking after us, and calling wistfully.

All that day we followed game-trails through killing thorn-scrub. The brown flesh of the men was raked with gray scratches spotted with blood; blood-sucking ticks clung to every exposed patch of skin.

Thus far we had marched for nine days through the wilderness, forced marches averaging well over twenty miles a day, despite the hard going. The *sultanis* of the two villages we had touched had supplied us with carriers for the ammunition and other essential impedimenta, because I wanted to save the fighters as much as possible; but we walked away from these untrained carriers. Capable of carrying heavy loads for long distances, they were no good for rapid marches. As they became exhausted, we left them behind to make their way back to their villages.

My men were marching on one meal of half-raw freshly killed meat a day. It was dangerous to give notice of our presence by rifle-shots, and there was no opportunity to go aside for a long stalk. I only shot when I was certain of a close target—a zebra or an over-curious kongoni. Sometimes we went a full day without reaching a water-hole, and the men had to depend entirely upon the few leaky *chaguls* that were scattered among them.

THIS second day in the forest we ended in a bivouac by a rushing stream of cold water. The highlands at this point were at an elevation of several thousand feet. The cold was piercing; it cut through our thin tattered khaki like knives. We had nothing with which to shelter our poorly nourished, half-naked, exhausted bodies, except the little square groundsheets.

With these around their shoulders, the men dozed over tiny beds of embers sunk in pits for concealment. The two guards

stood wearily at their posts, with groundsheets buttoned around their necks, yet suffering bitterly from the cold. My bones ached with cold and exhaustion; I rose four times during the night and talked to the guards. No effort of will could keep them from dozing, but they stuck desperately to the job.

The sun rose over the edge of the escarpment with the suddenness of a tipped caldron of molten bronze. The dazzling brilliance flooded the gray hollows and touched the mountain-tops with flame. Daylight poured hotly upon us.

The first thing that caught my astounded attention as I looked about the encampment was the figure of a woman crouching over some embers broiling a bit of meat. Her half-naked body, gray with cold, still shivered in the chill of dawn; her soft brown skin was torn and scratched; but her expression was gentle and complacent.

Fatima had again followed us in the dark!

The problem was one of the most disagreeable I have ever faced. Out of loyalty and love for her husband, this woman had openly defied my orders. Nevertheless she had increasingly defied them. If I weakened now, overlooking her presence, I would rapidly lose control over all my men. If I yielded to Sidi,—an ex-German!—I must yield to all. When among strange tribes, my authority would vanish completely. The *askaris* had reached the point where if the woman beat me, I would become the butt of an imperishable joke.

AT this moment another obstacle rose that completely settled the matter. A runner, who had been waiting for dawn before showing himself, came into camp with an urgent dispatch.

It was from the O. C. informing me that the main force had already bumped the Germanees in the forest, capturing most of them and scattering the rest. The column therefore was retracing its route immediately, since the scattered Germanees no longer constituted a concrete menace. My orders were to return to the original base with the utmost speed, since the full battalion was under urgent orders to return to the coast, where it was expected to take part in the operations back of Kilwa near the Portuguese frontier.

Now, from the base of the escarpment, on the crest of which we were encamped, there stretched away the gray and buff Masai Steppe in dusty billows like old threadbare carpets. It was hot and dead-looking, already shaking with the heat of the sun that had been playing upon it for an hour. I could not help feeling a sensation of dread as I looked down at that scorched desert of thorn scrub, shallow salt-lakes and parched grass, with the dim outline of Kilimanjaro gleaming over a hundred and fifty miles away.

In the rainy season the plain was pale green about the base of the mountains and the edges of the wet dongas. Now columns of smoky dust swayed across the plains, spiraling upward, touching the yellow sky like wavering fingers, and the haze of a grass-fire walled the southern horizon.

I had the choice of making a sinuous detour around this plain, with only a possibility of moisture once a day, or of cutting straight across the plain—a march of almost eighty miles—without any water at all.

My men were in bad condition. Two had water-blisters on their feet extending from heel to toe; and all were feeling the pain and exhaustion of the long march. Yet I felt that by starting the *safari* at night, with *chaguls* and water-bottles full, after the men had soaked up all the water they could, I might cross the plain in two days and a half. Anyone unable to keep up would be in serious danger.

After consultation with Mohammed bin Nasur I decided to make the dash. Only men with the greatest powers of endurance could attempt it; but I knew my men, and believed them capable of it.

On the other hand, a woman following that *safari* would almost certainly be doomed.

FATIMA had already learned a great deal of the terrors of African night. She must have suffered bitterly from fear and hardship. I could see that her shoulders slumped slightly and her skin had a curious dull pallor that indicated exhaustion. Nevertheless, though she had suffered, I could not yield.

When Fatima and Sidi stood before me again, I explained all this.

"I told you, *bibi*," I said to Fatima, "that Sidi's punishment yesterday was light. His fate was with you!"

Fatima nervously returned my gaze in

silence, her fingers twisting the beads on her kidskin petticoat, while Sidi licked his dry lips, shifted very slightly from foot to foot, and stole sidelong glances at her.

Sidi was again given five lashes. Then his rifle was taken from him, and he was placed degradingly among the porters, and given a case of ammunition to carry.

"Yesterday," I pointed out, "Sidi was my personal orderly. This morning he was a private. Now he is a *shenzi* porter carrying a load on his head. Fatima, so long as you are with this *safari*, Sidi will suffer this punishment—and each new day I find you with us, every time my eyes behold you, I will add five additional lashes to his penalty."

This, I knew, would be conclusive.

Writing a second note for her to the political officer at Mendala, I placed her in the hands of the *sultani's* scouts, all of whom were leaving me here, instructing them to bring her safely to her home in Kitanga.

The remainder of the day the men bathed, soaking themselves in the cold water; they slept; they washed their tattered khaki; and they improvised extra water-vessels out of their cooking pots.

AT four o'clock we commenced the long descent to the plains. Two hours later we were striking out on the faint trail across the plains.

The moon, like an enormous Stilton cheese, rolled up over the hills and gave us light that made marching easy. It was one of those glorious nights in the open that make Africa live forever in the hearts of those who know her. There was little sound upon the plain that stretched about us on all sides, faintly luminous under the light of the moon. Occasionally we could hear the thin, sharp yelp of a jackal; and often the air trembled with the throbbing grunt of the hunting lion. For the rest, only the shuffling of our feet broke the stillness. The light of the moon floating in the dark blue sky, where all but the most brilliant stars had faded into obscurity, fell like a shower upon us.

By dawn we had covered almost twenty miles.

After an hour's halt we marched again. By noon the heat was too great for us to continue, and we rested in a sheltered donga until five o'clock. The men were in fairly good shape, and I felt certain that we would reach the slopes of Mount Meru by the following evening.

The men fell in somewhat listlessly as I blew the whistle. They filed away before me until the rear-guard caught up. Mohammed bin Nasur came up to me, and without even a fleeting change of expression, said in a low natural voice:

"*Effendi*, the water is entirely gone!"

Had Mohammed suddenly drawn his *panga* and slashed at me, I could hardly have experienced a more severe shock. In Africa, on the hot open veldt, especially if a man's food has been salty *biltong*, and he is already so badly run down that he has little physical reserve, twenty-four hours without water—without moisture of any sort, whether from meat, vegetable, roots or grass—will probably mean death.

I looked dazedly at the line winding slowly ahead—an efficient fighting force, following me with blind faith to destruction. An overwhelming feeling of guilt and calamity stunned me. My glance caught the figure of Sidi, grunting under the crushing load of ammunition, but offering no complaint and keeping full stride with the *askari* before him, and I thought with a pang how petty and useless this punishment was when we were facing the almost certain possibility of breaking up and perishing before the next day was done. On the other hand, I realized vaguely that it was this sort of discipline that kept the men together and compelled them habitually to rely upon their leader.

Some of them would get through—they were all Africans; but it seemed very certain that most of them would go under.

"But the *chaguls*, Mohammed!" I protested in a whisper. "They haven't been touched."

"*Effendi*, it was an accident. We used the water in the water-bottles first. We had plenty, considering the *chaguls*. But I have just looked at them. The canvas was old and rotten. They hung with the ends touching the ground, and the water seeped out as though through my fingers—"

WE looked at each other in silence. After a moment I said:

"Do you think we can make it, Mohammed? We've come about thirty miles. We have fifty more to cover!"

"God knows, *effendi!*"

"We may die, Mohammed."

"Yes, *effendi.*"

"Well, Mohammed," I said, touching on my own weak point, "my leg is very painful. The poison seems to have gone into the groin, and the sores on my ankle and instep are stiff and binding. You are stronger. Tomorrow I may not be able to go on. What can you do? What do you suggest?"

Mohammed shrugged.

"What is there to say, *effendi?* We are in the hands of God. The strongest will get through. The weakest will die. If that is the will of God, how can we change it?"

"Mohammed, are you willing to lose half a company of men without a rifle-shot? The blame is not yours—but it will be for you to make the explanations."

"That is true, *effendi.*" Mohammed looked out into the purple haze that fell like veils about us with the sudden sinking of the sun behind the dim escarpment. "We might halt," he suggested, "and send the strongest men forward to the stream at the foot of Mount Meru to bring water back to us."

"It is fifty miles there, and fifty back," I said. "None of us can make a hundred miles in three days!"

Mohammed shrugged. After some feverish thought, I said:

"All right, then. We will do this: Pick five of the strongest men. Then search among the *askaris* for the last drop of water. This water will be a reserve for the five. Tonight we must force the march as far and as fast as possible. It is cold. The men wont suffer until daylight; but they must not know the *chaguls* are entirely empty. We'll halt at ten o'clock. After that, as soon as they have had sufficient rest, the five selected men will go on. The water they have will keep them strong. There are *shambas* near the stream at the base of Mount Meru. They must get carriers there and send water back to us. We can probably last out another day—"

"In the name of God," said Mohammed vehemently, "it can be done!"

WE squeezed the wet canvas of the empty *chaguls* and filled two water-bottles. The canvas we stuck into a tight haversack, so the men might chew some moisture out of it in the morning. Mohammed picked his five men, and I gave them their instructions, telling them to push on immediately at their own gait.

Three of the men were Mnyamwezi, one a Warauscha and one a Nandi. The Nandi was the keenest of them all, and sized the situation up instantly.

"Bwana," he suggested, "perhaps Ssalonik"—indicating with a tilt of his chin the tall and somewhat dandified Warauscha—"and myself can find water near us here."

Ssalonik wore a detached air; but Mohammed snorted impatiently.

Everyone knows that there are water-holes scattered about the Masai Steppe—but the secret of their existence is preserved absolutely by the nomadic and fierce Masai, who need that rare moisture for their cattle. In that arid plain it is virtually impossible for a stranger to discover water, since it seeps through rocks at some depth and is of no benefit to vegetation that might betray its presence. Still, if anyone in the world were to discover it, other than a Masai, it might be a Nandi—or a Warauscha, who is akin to the Masai.

Therefore I grasped at the opportunity.

The three Mnyamwezi, therefore, stripped of all accoutrements save one rifle and a handful of ammunition among them, carrying their precious water-bottles, set off at the curious skipping pace of the plainsmen, while the Nandi and the Warauscha, relieved of their burdens and comfortably provided with water, walked easily ahead waiting for the first sign of dawn.

BY nine o'clock I was obliged to halt the column in a donga.

By this time the men were in a pitiable condition, and they knew that their water was gone.

Sidi sat hunched over with his head between his knees, staring dully into the dust. One of the men with the blistered feet had taken his sheath knife and cut his soles off. A tumor had formed on the shoulder of another, extending from shoulder-blade to hip, due to the weight of his rifle on the bare skin; he was in agony, and I had to slice it open with a scalpel. A similar thing had happened to another man, and he had gone out of his head in the night and disappeared to certain death on the plains, where we could hear lions hunting about us. We were all more or less bruised, lacerated, and aching with exhaustion.

Utter thirst is just as horrible as can be imagined. You can't exaggerate it. My tongue was swollen almost like a parrot's.

My lips were cracked. My eyes burned and ached with a gritty feeling. I could not swallow, because my throat, contracting, would stick together. The involuntary impulse to swallow almost strangled me; and I'd cough, a short, barking cough, and pant for air. I felt as though drowning in intangible heat-waves.

Every nerve tingled acutely with a sense of craving, a horrible craving for moisture—and with an apprehension of impending death. The kiln-dry atmosphere was sucking the moisture out of our bodies as an octopus sucks blood.

AT three o'clock I got the men to their feet and commenced to move, caching our heavy burdens and leaving them guarded by the utter cripples, to whom I gave scraps of the barely moist canvas to stay the pangs of their thirst. The shuffling, limping men looked at me with dull eyes rimmed with crusty dust; but I was myself experiencing too much pain to care.

Two hours later a figure suddenly appeared on a hillock to the left of the trail. Batting his hand to his lips to throw the sound, he yelled shrilly over and over again:

"Maji! Maji! Maji!"

A dry croak went up from the line:

"Water! The Nandi's found water!"

There was a rush toward the scout. Vitality flamed up in the men. Reviving for a moment, they staggered through the dust. When the impulse died down, we got them in order again, and halted until the scout came in.

He had located a small abandoned water-hole where water could still be obtained by digging. It was about six miles distant.

With the men in their present condition, that meant a march of almost three hours, and the sun was already setting. However, now that we were certain of getting water, we settled down to a steady forward shuffle, mumbling pebbles in our mouths, leaving the weaker men by the side of the trail when they could go no farther.

Finally, when darkness had completely settled, I decided to bivouac again, sending forward ten of the strongest men to bring back filled water-bottles. This enabled me to keep a force of at least thirty *askaris* still under my command. That is to say, they were within sight of me, and sound of my voice—though I'm afraid I could hardly raise it above a thick croak. We virtually dropped in our tracks in a loose square.

The pain in my leg kept me awake, so I relieved the suffering men of guard duty, the only danger being from a lion leaping among us, or a hyena on the blood-trail snapping at the faces or rumps of the sleeping men.

The little groups of exhausted men we had left behind by the trail were in the gravest danger from these causes. Whether or not they suffered any casualties I could not tell, but several times I heard rifle-shots, and I was satisfied that they were aware of their danger.

Propping my back against a pile of haversacks, with my leg stretched out on a pile of soft dust, I dejectedly watched the rising moon.

I knew now that my force was safe; but I felt, nevertheless, that I had lost my grip. My men had broken and scattered under my eyes, and I myself had also gone under—broken by hardship. My throat all at once contracted, almost strangling me. When I got my breath back, I buried my teeth frenziedly in my wrist, trying to moisten my throat with my own blood.

As I rolled my eyes, I became aware of a dark slinking form, moving suddenly toward me. Croaking with terror, I flung myself to one side, clawing for my revolver, and trying to cry out. A hand clutched my wrist, and the form half rose before me. It was not a beast.

It was Fatima!

Her voice whispered brokenly, vaguely, as though in a dream:

"Master, it is I—Fatima—Fatima binti Muslim! Quick! The Germanees are coming. They are behind me—marching for water."

THE misty light that veiled the veldt, the throbbing silence that filled the air, the vague grunts and sighs of the sleepers, the dim outline and low guttural whisper of the woman—all filled me with an apprehension of delirium. Her presence there seemed an utter impossibility. No woman could have followed in our tracks, and lived. It was unbelievable.

Fatima touched me again. The moonlight washed the contour of her beautiful form with a luminous glaze like Attic moonlight on an ancient bronze. Her large eyes were fixed on me compellingly.

"Bwana!" she repeated, raising her voice. "The Germanees are coming!"

Suddenly I recalled the rifle-shots behind us. With a shock, I realized that the enemy was actually upon us.

Instinctively I gave a low pipe to the whistle; and Mohammed, waking as sharply as an animal, came clambering and shuffling to my side. I explained rapidly. Turning to Fatima, he said:

"How far?"

"Not far, *bwana,*" she said, shifting uneasily. "I had to run before them."

"God!" grunted the Nubian, looking at her with admiration. "God is great and to be glorified!"

The presence of the enemy was as good as a dash of rain among the *askaris;* and my problem was simple.

I sent two men forward toward the water-hole to make a commotion beyond our position. Then we dropped back with the remaining men, and began arranging for an ambush.

The German patrol, confident from the condition of the men they had picked up that we were completely broken, walked straight into it.

It was one of those brief, murderous little actions that characterized the entire campaign in Africa. Silence suddenly broken by the spit of a nervous rifle; then the ripping racket of musketry. Orange dots of flame flickering like fireflies in a semicircle. Yells that sounded thin and futile in the vastness of the veldt. A rush of shadows, coughing, grunting. Then sudden silence again—a querulous, anxious English voice cursing softly—and a tense, breathless, shrill reply:

"We've hit them all, *effendi!*"

The men arriving from the water-hole had brought us perfect reinforcement. Those we had left behind, hearing the sounds of a genuine action, had struggled on, firing recklessly at longe range, lobbing indiscriminately into both the Germanees and ourselves. Exhaustion, surprise and the terrible realization that they had walked against the moonlight into a trap, completed the panic. The German *askaris* made one rush—at the very point where the water-carriers had rejoined the line, our strongest point—and were brought up short and submissive with the steel.

We took forty prisoners. Three of my own men were killed; but it was a better death than from thirst, which they had narrowly missed. Several others were wounded. But all in all, it was a tremendous success.

Water came into camp. Fires instantly leaped up. Meat crackled on the embers. Voices began to shout and laugh. With a blanket around me, I rolled over on a ground-sheet and fell sound asleep.

THE following morning carriers came into camp with water and supplies and some Muscat donkeys. The success of the extraordinary fight overshadowed everything. I was glad enough to restore Sidi to the ranks, and to acknowledge that Fatima had both beaten me and saved the lot of us.

She was full of smiles, walking beside her husband, laughing and chatting; and bantering with Mohammed bin Nasur, who watched her often with an expression of mingled perplexity and admiration. At the end of the day, he came to me and asked if I did not wish to make Sidi my orderly again. I said no, because after all was said and done, Sidi had dangerously deceived me.

"But," I added, "if you can induce Fatima to enlist, I'll make *her* my orderly. She's the best soldier of us all!"

"The Blackmailers," a novelette of the exciting, quick-action sort which Lemuel L. De Bra writes so well, will be a feature of our next issue. Another of equal interest is the novel of adventure in Papua, "The Sands of Oro," which will be contributed by Beatrice Grimshaw. Moreover, H. Bedford-Jones, Clarence Herbert New, Courtney Ryley Cooper, Warren H. Miller, Agatha Christie, Culpeper Zandtt and several other writers of vivid and vigorous fiction will be represented by their best work. Better leave an order now with your newsdealer to reserve for you a copy of the November *Blue Book Magazine.*

The Trail to Bitter Gulch

A spirited novelette of the modern West, wherein a powerful drama of unusual interest is tellingly developed. The author will be remembered for his excellent "Tales of an Honest Grafter."

By WILLIAM O. GRENOLDS

FOR the first time since the aspens had colored in the autumn, and the snowshoe rabbits had made their primary tracks in the white of the higher hills, the tiny window was wide open in the squatty cabin of Lafe Bradbury. A chinook had been blowing all day, cutting deep into the splotchy drifts along the trails; the early night was warm and starlit, and Lafe turned from the lamp on the table to gaze without as his big hands shuffled and fumbled a deck of oft-used cards.

"Kind o' roundin' into spring, Ed," he said finally, and began to deal. The other man followed his gaze.

"Yep." Then he picked up his cards. "Guess I can open."

Lafe studied his hand. He was broad-shouldered, tall, fully an inch taller than the man who sat opposite him, with something in the seriousness of his half-sad, half-lonely brown eyes which made him appear much the older; yet a closer scrutiny would have brought forth the fact that there was only a slight difference in age. However, there was something about the very bigness of him, the halting yet kindly deliberation of his mannerisms, the almost paternal glances which he gave the other man as he fumbled his cards, which gave to him the air of a father amusing himself with a beloved son.

There was little at stake; the chips represented pennies and nickels only—a device which had served to pass many a long hour during the winter months in which Kentucky Cañon had been buried in mammoth drifts, and the trail to town, a mile away, had been a thing of sheer precipices and impassable barriers. But that time was gone now; the hills were opening up; the fierceness of a Colorado mountain winter giving way to the soft commands of an approaching spring. Lafe looked out the window again as he waited for the dealing of his hand.

"Ought to be awful good fishin' this summer, Ed," he said.

The other man nodded absently. "Yeh, I guess so. Streams weren't stocked so very well last year, though."

"No, guess that's right. But then, a

fellow can always get 'em if he knows where to go. Anyway, don't guess I'll worry much about the fishin' around here—"

Ed looked up sharply.

"You put it over, then?"

"Me? Yes! Didn't I tell you?" Then with a shrug of the shoulders: "That's right—you slept most of the day. What time did you get in, anyway?"

ED fingered his cards nervously. "About midnight."

"Who? You?" Big Lafe grinned. "You'd better get yourself a new watch. I woke up at a quarter of two, and you weren't in yet."

"I was in at midnight!" Ed said it somewhat snappily, and again with that fatherly air of a parent giving way to the asperity of a child, Big Lafe dropped the subject.

"Maybe you was, only I didn't hear you." The card-game was neglected now —except for Ed, who seemed to find something of great interest in the five bits of pasteboard in his nervous hands. Big Lafe still looked out the window. "I've been thinkin' a heap about ranchin' again. Like it a lot better'n this minin' game. Don't guess I was cut out to gopher around in these hills, anyway. Lord!" He slapped a leg. "I knowed there was somethin' I forgot today. I never put that money in the bank—walked right past it too!"

"Money? What money?"

"The mine money. That West Butte bunch paid me part in cash—twenty-four hundred dollars." Then he turned, to observe the queer expression of the other man's face. "But I aint goin' to say anything about it down below, Ed. Not that it'd make any difference—but I just want to shoot square."

"She'll know it, though."

"Guess so. Still, it wouldn't make any difference, Ed—not with her." He picked up his cards. "Kind o' roundin' into spring, Ed. Soon be May now. Wonder which of us it's goin' to be?"

The other man pressed his lips, as though to keep back an ejaculation. When he spoke, there was only a trace of annoyance:

"Don't know, Lafe. Thinks a lot of both of us, I guess. Let's play these cards."

"Guess you're right, at that. I'll crack it—for two bits."

"Raise you two bits."

"Right back at you."

"Same here." Then Ed looked at his diminishing pile of chips. "Playing two dollars back," he announced, as his fingers pushed into a vest pocket and pulled at a two-dollar bill. As the currency came forth, something else came with it—two bits of golden finery which tinkled to the table and gleamed there close to Big Lafe's outstretched hand—a diamond ring and a locket. A sweating palm shot swiftly forward to cover them, but too late. Lafe had already raised them for a closer view.

"Where'd you get these gewgaws, Ed?"

"Oh, it's just stuff I've had around for a long time. Give it to me."

AN agonized expression had come into Big Lafe's brown eyes, a sudden grayness about his lips; he failed to obey the command of the other man.

"I said," he repeated slowly, "where'd you get this?"

"And I said I'd had it. Aint any crime in having a few trinkets in your pocket, is there?"

The other man leaned back in his chair, one big fist still clasping the jewelry. "What's been the matter with you the last couple of days, Ed?" he asked finally. "You've been as fidgety as—"

"Well, is that anything? I aint felt well. Let's finish this hand."

"Nope, don't guess I want to play any more." Suddenly old, suddenly tired, Big Lafe rose from the table, stood by the window for a moment, then moved slowly into the other room. Still beside the lamp, pretending not to watch, yet following his every action, the other saw him paw slowly about among his few clothes, at last to bring forth a gray coat, examine it carefully, then with a sigh hang it up again. After this, he stood for a long moment with his shoulders stooped; then at last, as though forcing himself to something he dreaded, he walked to the bed, knelt, brought forth a big revolver in a holster, slipped its catch, broke it and sniffed at the long blue barrel. Then he rose and returned to the room—and to his position beside the window, looking out again at the stars and the shadowy black pines, as though he sought from them badly needed aid. At the table, Ed had taken the old pack of cards and was pretending absorption in a hand of solitaire. But he watched the bigger man nevertheless.

A LONG time passed. Then, haltingly:

"Would you want to see a Denver paper, Ed? Fellow brought one into the Bon Ton while I was eatin' and left it. It's over in my sheepskin."

The player's eyes turned hungrily toward the red-headlined bundle in a pocket of the sheepskin coat—voracious, hunted eyes; but the man himself made no move.

"Nothing in it, is there?"

"Nothin', except about the T&R hold-up. They've got old man Kendall down in a hospital there. Look for him to die."

"So?" Ed, at the table, made a misplay and failed to notice it. But from the window:

"Oughtn't you've put that trey on that four spot?"

"Yeh!" The change was made. "Kendall's going to die, huh?"

"Looks that way. Aint regained consciousness. Been tryin' to find the bullet —probin' for it. But they aint had any luck. The paper's got things a lot different from what the talk is aroun' town."

Once more hungry eyes turned toward that bundle in the sheepskin—but the shaking hands still dealt solitaire. Big Lafe continued:

"For instance, did you hear anything about this fellow, whoever he was, gettin' four hundred dollars off Kendall?"

"Who? Me? No—didn't hear much at all, except that somebody's held up the messenger on Number Seven, and that he never got anything. Guess that's about right; these city papers are always making up something."

"Maybe." Then Big Lafe Bradbury turned from the window and flattened his shoulders against the wall. His breath pulled hard, the action of a man forcing himself into something he hated to face. "But it looks pretty straight. It's one of the railroad men that does the talkin'. Seems that Number Seven slowed down at Tie Bar as usual, and that Kendall opened the door of the express-car to toss out a package. When the train started again and he went to close up, a man with a mask on raised up over the edge of the door—must have been standin' on the truss-rod—and shoved a gun at him, and told him to open up the strong-box."

"Have they got all that in there?" Again those hungry eyes. Lafe nodded.

"Seems that Kendall tried to pretend there wasn't anythin' in the box, but the robber seemed to know better and told him that he knew about ten thousand in currency that was being shipped to Denver from the Miners and Sampler's Bank, and for him to open up. Kendall started over to the box, but instead of goin' straight to it, he tried to get his sawed-off shotgun, and the fellow plugged him. Then the railroad detectives figure he must have gotten scared, because he didn't try to open the box. Seems that Kendall was figurin' on pullin' out from the Bitter Gulch country and goin' down to Denver and startin' a little restaurant there. He'd sold out most everything he had, and was takin' all the money with him, four hundred dollars, besides some stuff he'd figured on sellin' down in Denver. The robber took that; then he must have jumped out of the car. When they found old man Kendall at the next stop, he was just about unconscious. Didn't have time to tell much more'n what I've said—then he flickered out. . . . . Got an open space there for that king, Ed."

"Thanks. Haven't caught anybody yet?"

"No, not yet, Ed. Haven't got much of a description—old man Kendall was pretty scared, I guess. Just one or two things."

"One or two?"

"Yes. . . . . Wont that six go on that seven?"

"One or two, did you say?"

"Yes, Ed. Not much, though. Nothin' about size or anything like that—less they didn't let it out. Just that he had a gray coat on, and a mask made out of some black stuff, with eye-holes cut in it." Then Big Lafe's eyes centered. "Look here, Ed Anderson," he broke forth suddenly, "you quit that there game and look at me!"

"Me? Why—what's—"

BUT Big Lafe, halting, hesitating again, had come to the table, caught the other man's shoulder, and swung him slowly around.

"Ed," he asked huskily, "how long've you and me been together?"

"About a year. Why?"

"I've treated you right, aint I, Ed?"

"Why, sure, Lafe."

"I've—now, don't get me wrong, Ed; I aint throwin' anything up to you, because I aint got anything to throw. It's all on the other side—but I've done my best to make up to you, aint I, Ed?"

"Why, sure, Lafe. What's all this about?"

"I've give you work in the mine, such as it was, and fed you and kept you, aint I?"

"Yes. Why—"

"I aint never asked you no questions; you happened in here when I was layin' sick, not able to move, hardly, and you took care of me, and I've tried my best to make up for it. I've sure thought a heap of you for doin' that, Ed."

The other man shook himself free from the grasp of Big Lafe and strove, in half-dazed fashion, to go back to his game.

"Oh, what's the matter with you, Lafe? What are you bringing all that up for? I can't get what you're driving at."

"I'm just drivin' at this, Ed—" He cleared his throat in hesitant, painful fashion. "I'm—I'm just drivin' at this: what'd you do it for?"

"Do it?" Ed Anderson threw down his cards. His face was white now. "What've I done?"

"You know, Ed. My gray coat in there—it's got blood on it. My—"

"You're crazy, Lafe!"

"My gun's been shot—and it aint been cleaned. The powder still smells in it."

ED ANDERSON rose, his sweating hands slowly tearing a card to bits. "What're you—"

Big Lafe went huskily on:

"The rest of the stuff that was taken off old man Kendall, so the paper says, was a diamond ring of his wife's, and a little gold locket, with engravin' on it. The name's *Ruth*. Now, do you know, Ed,"—he looked in grieving fashion toward his companion,—"that's the name that's on this here thing that you just dropped out of your pocket!"

He showed it for an instant; then suddenly his hand pulled away as the other man grasped for it. For a long moment there was no sound, save of heavy breathing. Then again, low but racking:

"What'd you do it for, Ed?"

"I didn't—"

"Don't say that! Look at me, Ed! Don't say that—don't try to lie to me. What'd—"

A sudden flashing came into the eyes of Ed Anderson. His fists doubled, and one pounded on the table.

"What'd I do it for?" he asked excitedly. "You ought to know, Lafe! You selling out your mine—and May coming—you with all that money—"

"Lord, Ed, you didn't figure—"

But the other man had realized his advantage, and was pushing it.

"Why shouldn't I figure it that way? You knew what it'd mean—you've told me so!"

"Ed, I never—"

"You did! You did! That's all you've been talking about, how you'd start up a ranch if you got the money, and how you'd buy her everything she wanted, as long as the money held out. You knew that'd influence a woman! You know you did!"

"But Lord, Ed, I never figured on makin' you feel bad. Honest—I just had my mind on it—"

"That's it, you had your mind on it—and you kept talking about it and throwing it up to me. What could I do—huh? Just answer me that: what could I do? Me with nothing but empty hands, and you going around there with twelve thousand dollars—"

"It was only 'leven, and I aint got but a part of it yet."

"Well, eleven, then! Don't you think that'd made a difference to a woman? Don't you suppose she'd stop and think before—"

"Lord, Ed!" Big Lafe's arms had dropped limply. "I—I never figured that way. I just never thought, I guess. I'd shared it with you—before I'd—I'd ever let you do a thing like this. I'd rather you'd had all of it before gettin' into a mess—"

"That's what you say now!" Across the table Ed Anderson was snarling, and fighting with all the reserve play that his mind could give him. "Easy enough to say things, Lafe—when you've got the other fellow in a hole with the goods on him. You can talk your head off, but that doesn't keep me out of the pen!"

"I—I guess that's right, Ed. I never figured you cared that much."

"No, you were the only one that cared! You never thought I had any feelings at all. That's just it—you could do all the talking you wanted,—you never figured how it might hit me! Now that you've got me, you've not even giving me a chance—not even—"

But brown eyes had centered on blue eyes, in a steady gaze.

"I wouldn't say that, Ed. I aint turned you up yet. I aint even said I was goin' to turn you up. In the first place, you

ought to know that I wouldn't forget you comin' in here and stayin' by me when I couldn't even get word to town. You ought to know that, Ed. Besides, I never figured that I'd lead you into anything like this—just talkin' about money—honest, I never, Ed!"

ANDERSON bit his lips, picked up the deck of cards, then tossed them back to the table.

"I don't guess you did, Lafe. But—that's the way it turned out. I'm whipped now—unless you keep your mouth shut, and give me a chance."

The other man shook his head. "That depends Ed, on what Lil says."

"Lil?" The eyes suddenly brightened.

"Yes. Guess we'd better saddle up. It's early."

"What're you going to do?" Ed remained at the table. Big Lafe moved slowly, almost painfully, into the bedroom, and went to his knees, that he might drag forth his revolver and buckle the belt about him. At last he answered:

"Lord, I just don't know, Ed. Don't even know why I'm puttin' this gun on. Somethin's runnin' through my head—but I don't know what it is. All this kind of took me sudden."

Then dazedly he led the way to the door and held it open. The other man hesitated, his eyes narrowed, his lips pressed tight. His hands twitched, then toyed a moment with the scattered deck of cards. Finally:

"You're not going any farther than Lil's?"

"I—I don't know, Ed. I'm tryin' to answer you honest. They say a woman always knows best—she knows more'n a man does, anyway."

Again that flash of hope in the narrowed blue eyes.

"You're going to talk to Lil first? And tell her all about it?"

For the third time:

"I just don't know, Ed. I just don't know what I'm goin' to do. It depends what she says—first off, when I ask her somethin'. She's the real one that we've got to think about. It's her heart that'd break if you were the one, Ed. She's got to be figured on—'taint just us alone; it's which one of us—"

He halted. The other man had turned from the table, passed him in the doorway and was leading the way toward the tiny, angular mountainside corral which held their horses. Five minutes later, silent, Big Lafe leading the way, they moved slowly down the cañon trail toward the twinkling lights which told of town. But at a tiny house on the outskirts, they halted. A moment later Big Lafe knocked at the door.

A wait. Then the door opened—enough to admit the sight of peering, frightened eyes. Big Lafe shuffled his feet.

"It's only me, Lil," he announced.

"Oh!" It came in a tone of relief. "I didn't know. Is Ed with you?"

"Yes, he's right here. You act kind of scared, Lil."

"I didn't know who it was." Then she held open the door, a small, dark-haired woman with eyes almost as black as her hair, with cheeks too highly colored, and with a smile which seemed to come a bit too easily to the full red lips—as though it were practised. But Lafe did not see, just as he never had seen. Nor did he notice, as he passed within, the quick, warning glance which passed from the blue eyes of the man behind him, to be caught by the flashing black ones and resignaled by the faintest flickering of the eyelids. They went into the little parlor, with its ancient furniture, its crocheted doilies, and its china Cupids under a dome of glass. Big Lafe's hands clasped behind his back. He opened his mouth, as though the better to breath.

"Figured you might still be up, Lil," he said at last. "Me and Ed've been kind of talkin' things over tonight. Seems like we can't wait till May."

Again a glance which Big Lafe did not notice. The black-eyed Lil turned smilingly toward him.

"But you both gave your promise."

"Yes—yes, I know. But a little somethin's come up that may—take one of us out of town for a spell, and we sort of figured that maybe it'd be best—aint that about the size of it, Ed?"

"Yes. We ought to know, Lil."

THERE was that in his tone which gave her the impulse to whirl toward him, but instead she only continued to look up into the hungry eyes of Big Lafe. Her tiny hands, too smooth, too small, moved upward, and caught at the rough collar of his sheepskin. The smile departed.

"I'm so sorry, Lafe—so terribly sorry."

"Then,—" he seemed to be staring far

out beyond her, beyond the man who stood behind her, beyond the ill-printed figures of the poorly papered wall,—"then it isn't me?"

"I'm afraid not, Lafe. I'm sorry—"

He turned slowly, and silently walked about the room, stopping to stare at the china Cupids of the mantel, to finger a doily in absent fashion, to pick up a paper-bound book and look at it, without even seeing its title. He coughed, then cleared his throat noisily. His big hat lay on the sofa where he had tossed it, and now he reached for it. Then, gropingly, he sought the door.

"Thanks, Lil," he said with an attempt at appreciation. "I knew you'd speak right out when the time came." He turned, put forth a hand and grinned. "So long, Lil. So long, Ed. I'll look after that little business out of town. Don't worry about it for a minute—I'll 'tend to it."

THEN, without even a clear knowledge of what they had done or said, he rode, a slumped figure, out of the broadening of the cañon and into the main street of the town. A restaurant was open. He entered it, vaguely borrowed a paper and pencil, and moved on to the little darkened building which formed the office of the sheriff. There in the semidarkness he scrawled a message, brought forth his pocket-knife, threaded a diamond ring and the thin chain of a gold locket upon its smallest blade, and with a thrust, drove it deep into the wood of the door, where it might hold a fluttering bit of paper until morning, until the surprised eyes of a sheriff might read:

Deer Bill:
I done it. But you will have to catch me.
Lafe Bradbury.

An hour later he turned from his cabin toward the trail which led over the ridge to Bitter Gulch. A doubled gunnysack was tied behind his saddle, filled with food, and on top of this a blanket. His thirty-thirty rested across his arms; he guided his horse by the merest touch of the reins, or by a push of a knee.

The night was still warm—warm, with a mixture of crispness creeping down from the high-piled snows of the Continental Divide, warm with a hint of warmer nights to come, when the streams would be soft murmuring things instead of the rushing torrents of snow-water which they now were; warm with the promise of smooth lakes and leaping trout, of the fields of larkspur and paintbrush, of the columbine blooming in the shadow of the mountain drift. He raised his head with an effort. He looked toward the droning pines, clustering the hill which intervened between him and the baldness of Seldon Mountain with its black, deserted shaft-houses and mine dumps. He imagined that he caught the scent of pine-needles, that he heard the call of a meadow-lark in a valley, the cheeping of ptarmigan amidst the rock-slides of the glacial lakes. He sighed, the sigh of a man who was leaving it all behind, who was going forth into the unknown, that he might pay a debt to his own loquacity, to a person who had befriended him, to a woman who loved another.

For Big Lafe Bradbury knew but little of man and less of woman. His education in life had given him but a meager knowledge of how to take; it had been his instinct, and his lot, to give—a sort of second nature which had made him the unknowing butt of many an innocent conspiracy back in his cowpuncher days, which had sent him first to the bar to treat in the times when the sole beckoning light of the cow-hand was the gleam of a saloon, which had found him always with the hardest task, the first to volunteer in a vacant place, the last to remonstrate when hours in the saddle and the grueling work of round-up had resulted only in an order from the foreman for three more hands to hit leather again in search of stragglers. To give—it had been Lafe's portion and acceptance, to give in work, work, work, when once he had left the ranching country, and found through blind fortune a pencil-streak of pay ore; to give, when that streak had widened to a vein and when cool-headed, cooler-blooded men had wanted what he possessed, and had ill concealed their astonishment at his acceptance of their insufficient offer. To give—

AND now Lafe had given all that he possessed—not in money, it is true, for there still rested in a pocket that first payment on his mine; dully Lafe wondered what would become of the rest of the installments if he were not there to receive them. But the thought passed out of his mind almost as rapidly as it had come—just as a thousand thoughts were crowding through, unimportant and inconsequential,

for after all, nothing really seemed to matter now. It was as though he were dead, yet alive, cognizant of everything, but realizing nothing.

In a dim way Lafe realized that several things were necessary, both for his well-being and for as much of a peaceful condition of mind as was possible under the circumstances. He must make his escape, change his name, lose his old identity and somewhere begin life anew. Wyoming appealed to him, or Utah; the country was broad there, and Lafe had been a good cow-hand before he had taken his fling at chasing gold. He did not worry about that side of his future; somehow he had managed before; he could manage now.

That he had taken upon his own shoulders the responsibility for another's crime seemed only natural under the circumstances. Ed had been good to him during the epidemic; that deserved something. Besides, Lafe had been responsible for everything in a way; Ed never would have done it if he had not been taunted by the thought of his rival's coming wealth—and besides, there was Lil. Lafe had thought of her and what it might mean to her to know that the man she loved was a thief, possibly a—

The word "murderer" cut deep into Lafe's dulled mentality as he rode slowly through the night on the trail to Bitter Gulch. Everything had come so suddenly that the thought of the badly wounded Kendall had traveled past with everything else in a haze of uncertain reality. However, now that things were growing clearer—

But he had made his decision—nor would he change it. More, he was on the way to Bitter Gulch and to the meager atonement that he could offer. Lafe knew, from the mouth-to-mouth directory of the hill country, that Kendall's wife and daughter lived at the entrance to Bitter Gulch, in a little gray house with faded green trimmings—the first dwelling to be seen from the ridge when one rode over the hump. It would only mean a few moments to stop there, to tell some innocent lie, and to leave behind him the equivalent of the badly needed money which had been stolen from the wounded express messenger. He could do that, at least. So he rode on—a humped figure in the night, allowing his horse to pick its way at will, barely cognizant that the wind was becoming shriller with the deeper hours of darkness, and that the drone of the pines carried a whine of approaching coldness. By and by he pulled the collar of his sheepskin closer about his neck, and a big hand rested for a moment on the place where smaller hands had gripped the coat earlier in the evening. Then it dropped limply to the rifle again. Big Lafe rode on.

The ridge at last, and he straightened, to look into the valley. No light shone there, and Lafe drew a big hand across his chin. This was unexpected.

"Maybe they've gone to Denver," he announced to his patient horse. "Maybe not, though. Maybe they're just in bed. Don't guess I ought to wake 'em."

But he still sat staring down into the blackness of the valley. A duty lay there,—Lafe was not the sort of man to think of the mails or of a secretive note slipped under a door,—a duty born of his self-assumed crime; and without that duty fulfilled, his path was blocked. At last he looked anxiously to the northwest, and the faint white of the snowy range which lay between him and freedom.

"Reckon I ought to get as far as I could tonight," he mused. "Liable to be a moon tomorrow night—and Bill's bunch after me. But—I oughtn't to wake 'em."

ONLY one recourse seemed left, and Lafe Bradbury accepted it. Back in gladder days, scrambling along the ridge when the quaking asps were golden and the three days of the deer season permitted a shot at a four-point buck, Lafe had slept one night in the dusty, gray-lined cavern of a deserted mine-tunnel where a surface scattering of radiating veins had made necessary a far larger opening than usual. It was out of the beaten track, practically unknown, and large enough to conceal himself and the thing which formed, at the same time, his greatest asset and liability—his horse. Twenty minutes later he came within its shelter, to stare about him in the flickering glow of a match and then, in a sodden, matter-of-fact way, to tether his horse to a timber and to spread his blankets. He was tired, dog tired, in a fashion he never had known before; an inward fatigue seemed to have eaten his every atom of strength: soon the yawning, eerie old mine tunnel was still, save for the fretting of the horse, the scampering of the pack-rate far back somewhere, and the slow *drip-drip* of seep-

age from a rock-fissure into the depths of the shaft-pool hundreds of feet below.

Morning—a mountain jay yanged discordantly in the aspen just beyond the tunnel opening. Big Lafe stirred, and stretching, unrolled himself from his blankets, looked about him in wondering fashion for a moment and for a long time sat silently staring at nothing. At last his big hands rubbed slowly together, and his shoulders straightened from their sagging position.

"This sort of thing aint goin' to get me nothin'," he said to the horse and to the cavernous depths of the tunnel. "Wonder if I could risk a fire?"

He rose and walked to the entrance, then stood a moment gazing down into the valley. Some one was moving about the little gray house with the green trimmings, evidently a young woman, busy with the morning chores. Big Lafe grunted.

"Aint gone to Denver, anyway."

He gathered a handful of pine needles and an armload of dry wood. Far back in the tunnel he cooked his breakfast of scalding coffee and salty bacon. Then, leading his horse, he took it forth to graze.

And through the morning, as from the shelter of pine and spruce and balsam he watched the surrounding hills for the first view of the posse he feared, Lafe watched also that figure which moved about the little house at the mouth of Bitter Gulch. For the first time in his life he was lonely, lonely with a gnawing feeling of friendlessness, of a disconnection with a world, which, though he might not have known it well, was there for him to meet and mingle with when he chose. But now the gates were closed and barred, the friends gone, communication cut. His mind was clearer now; he realized more fully that he was an outlaw—and what that meant. So he watched the figure below with longing eyes, his sole connection with a thing departed.

AFTERNOON came, and Lafe returned his mount to the secrecy of the tunnel, while he selected for himself a position in the aspen outside, where he might see and plan. A good night's riding, if he pushed his horse, should take him over the worst of the Divide, providing the drifts weren't too deep, and well down toward Fraser and the Middle Park country. Life there would not be dangerous, he knew—there were too many cuts and draws and gulches, too many rocky, closely timbered stretches along the tumbling Grand, for him to fear much interference. Then, once in the Cañon of the Gore, and bound up toward the Little or Big Bear, his course would be unmolested. Only a night away; he could drop down there in the valley about dusk, and then head straight on.

But his eyes had followed his thoughts, to notice the young woman just leaving the house, and heading out resolutely on the road which led to Tall Pine three miles away. Lafe wondered for a moment why she was on foot—then remembered that the paper had told of the sale of Kendall's negotiable possessions. Naturally that meant any livestock; and Lafe, with a new and sudden premonition, anxiously watched the fading form.

"Maybe she's goin' to Denver!" he mused hopelessly. "Still, if she is, where's her maw? Or maybe her maw's already gone!"

Yet he knew now that he could not follow—before he could overtake her, she would be on the ridge, in plain sight of town. He could only wait and hope; besides, if her maw hadn't gone—

But no life showed at the drab little cottage. Only a few chickens—dots from this distance—moving about the yard, a lazy dog which dozed comfortably on the doorstep. Lafe broke a twig between his big fingers.

"Wish I had a dog," he said, then watched the brittle bits of wood fall one by one to the ground.

The afternoon grew more lonely. Lafe wished that there were some human he could watch, some being who could take his mind from things he shouldn't think about. For he was wondering what had been said in the little plush-furnished room after he had left, when they would be married, where they would live and whether they'd come to see him, if he should be—

"Aint much chance of that, though." The tone was bluntly matter of fact. "I aint goin' to get caught!"

But as he said it, he wondered whether this loneliness would be his unvarying portion now—this feeling of the outcast, of the differentiated being who must conceal everything, who must lie about his name, his past, his identity, who must forever be watchful, suspicious of every friend, every inquirer. He thought of Bill

the sheriff—ruddy-faced, friendly, the type of a man who'd do what he could to get a light sentence for a fellow who looked like he deserved it. Maybe Bill might be able to fix things so it wouldn't mean more than a few years in Cañon City; he might even get him road work, so there'd only be the cell at nights. A squirrel barked, and a jay called. Big Lafe's mouth went grim.

"I aint goin' to get caught!" he repeated —and rose swiftly. A human form, that of a woman, had shown on the road far in the distance, returning afoot from Tall Pine. A moment later he was in the saddle and threading his way down the side of the mountain toward that approaching figure; loneliness had done its work. In his mind was the vague excuse that it would be better to talk to her now, to get it over with, and then ride back to his cache, so as to take advantage of the first fall of darkness in the traversing of more dangerous ground. He urged his mount to dangerous descents, and with an eye to the every advantage of a short-cut. Soon he was in the valley, skirting a deep, ice-fringed stream, and searching for an opportunity to ford it.

The girl looked up in surprise when the crackling of the aspens told of his descent from the creek-bed—surprise without fear. She was young; Lafe could see that at a glance, young and bright-featured and poorly clothed, taller than Lil,—one person only formed a basis of comparison in Lafe's brain,—and lighter in eyes and hair and complexion. A bit pale, too—as though from sleeplessness and worry. Lafe's big hand went to a bigger hat.

"Afternoon, ma'am," he said. "Don't happen to know anybody named Kendall lives around here?"

"Kendall?" She smiled. "That's my name."

"You tell 'em!" It was Lafe's first attempt at deceit. "Maybe you aint the Kendall I'm lookin' for?"

"I don't know about that." She smiled again, and Lafe watched her greedily. It was good to be here in the sun, talking to some one who smiled. Then she went on: "I'm Ruth Kendall—if that's who you're looking for. My father's express messenger. . . . . That is, he was."

"Yessum. That's the one." Then he blurted: "I'm from the Express Company."

"Oh, did you know him?"

"Well, not exactly. I've—you know—I'm kind of a field man. Yeh, guess that's what you'd call it. I'm—"

He stopped short, with the realization that his name must not be mentioned. The notices might already be posted in Tall Pine. But her eyes revealed no suspicion, no evidence that she believed him to be otherwise than he had announced.

"I don't believe I've ever heard Dad mention a field department."

"Guess not. Kind of a separate division." Then suddenly: "Heard how he is today?"

"Yes. That's where I've been—to telephone to Denver. We haven't any wire out this way. They said at the hospital that he's just about the same. They don't look for any change—either way—for a few days."

"I guess they can't tell much about them things." Lafe rubbed again at the saddle horn. "Never can tell how a thing'll turn out. Your Maw's down in Denver, I guess?"

"No, she's home. She's been sick, anyway, and this—"

She hesitated. Lafe swallowed hard.

"Yeh, I know how it is. Guess you're frettin' to get home?"

"Why—yes—"

"Thought you might be. Mind swingin' behind?" Then, as she hesitated: "Guess I can talk what business there is to be talked while we're movin', as easy as standin' here."

He offered her a stirrup and a strong left arm. A quick movement, and she sat behind him. Lafe gave his mount the reins. They moved forward, and the girl caught swiftly at the man's shoulder for support.

"We had a horse, but Dad sold it off. We were planning—"

"Yeh. That's what they sent me to see you about. 'Course, everything'll be done for him that they can be, but about that money, you know . . . . Well, accordin' to the paper, it was about four hundred dollars, and then they figured that maybe you might need a little more—so they sent me over to see if about five hundred'd tide you over—"

"But they haven't gotten the money back?"

"Oh, no—but well, you know how it is. 'Taint right to let a man get hurt in his work and not do somethin'. This aint got nothin' to do with the law department,

you know, an' whatever they may say's right and proper about your dad's bein' hurt. I don't know nothin' about that. They just said to give you this money. So I rode over—"

They reached the yard of the little gray house. The girl dismounted, and faced him, her hand on the gate.

"Wont you come in?"

Lafe stammered and reached for his money.

"Don't guess I've got time for that. Some other—other things to do." But he looked longingly toward the door. "Besides, there aint anything to 'tend to, except for you to take this money."

He handed it to her and waited until she could count it, grateful for the crinkled condition of the bills which made the action a difficult one. Up there on the ridge was a dim, dusty cavern, and loneliness. It was a full hour yet until dusk—a long hour up there.

"How about the receipt?"

Her question pulled him back suddenly.

"Receipt? Oh, that'll be all right. I forgot to bring it."

"I can make one out for you in just a minute." She reached the door and turned. "Wont you come in?"

IT was his last chance for human companionship. Quickly Lafe's eyes swept the hills,—discovered no trace of horsemen. Then with a sudden impulsiveness he dismounted and followed her. The girl laughed in apologetic fashion.

"You'll have to pardon the looks of the place; we've sold nearly everything."

But Lafe had failed to notice the bareness of the clean little room. All he could see was the brightness of the sun shining through the white curtains; all he could realize was that this was a home, perhaps the last he would see for days and weeks to come. It blurred his mind; he turned, half expecting to find Lil standing beside him. But it was only Ruth Kendall, moving one of the few chairs nearer.

"If you don't mind waiting until I've seen how Mother is—and told her about Father?"

Lafe nodded, and adjusted his bulky frame to the rickety chair. He sat twirling his big hat and looking at the floor until she should return. It had come to him that he was in the house of the man whom he now stood accused of having attempted to kill. And he found himself wondering what she would say if she knew it. Kind of like Lil, he thought again and again, but then again she wasn't. Lil had a different way of saying things somehow, like she'd known everybody in the world; while this girl—maybe that was the reason—she was lots younger than Lil.

A long time; then the door of a bedroom opened, and the girl entered, a pencil and paper in her hands.

"Couldn't find the pen." She laughed in embarrassed fashion, and drew a chair to the table. "But then, I guess it doesn't make much difference. The ink's dried up, anyway; we've been figuring on moving.

" 'Received of,' " she was writing now, " 'the American Railway Express, via'—you didn't mention your name."

Lafe thought quickly.

"Yessum. That's right. Don't need to put it in unless you want to. Or—just say Mr. Jones."

" 'Via Mr. Jones, agent, the sum of five hundred dollars. Ruth Kendall.' Is that enough?"

"Yessum. That'll be fine."

She handed him the paper, and he stuffed it into a pocket. Then slowly he looked over a shoulder toward the ridge. The sun had begun to drop. On the north slopes the pines were blackening, and blue shadows beginning to creep beneath them. Lafe moved uneasily and twirled his hat.

"Guess I'd better be movin' along. Hope your dad gets all right."

But he made no movement, save that of his hands as it turned the wide hat. The girl leaned against the table.

"I hope so," she said fervently. "He's everything we have, you know. And he's always been so good to us."

Tears appeared in her eyes, welling there, then touching her cheeks with gentle slowness. Big Lafe cleared his throat.

"Yessum. I know how it is. I guess I'd better be gettin' along."

But still he did not rise. Away inside him something which ached was calling for just a minute more, just another word of companionship before he again became a hunted, friendless thing. The girl's voice:

"Have you far to go?"

"Yessum. A good ways."

"Back to Georgeville?"

"No'm. Guess I'll be headin' the other way."

"Wont it be terribly late before you get anything to eat?"

"Oh, I've got a little grub with me."

"But that isn't warm food. If you'd care for it, I could fix you something."

"Yessum." There was more than mere bodily hunger in the eyes of Lafe Bradbury. "That'd sure be fine. But it'd be a heap of trouble."

NEVERTHELESS he stayed, stayed while the big hawks began and ended their evening circles high above the hills, until the clouds beyond the ridge had turned rose and purple and rose again, while the pines stood forth like a ragged fringe against the sky, finally to melt into the blue blackness of the mountain night—stayed to sit there in the chair and watch her, once the lamp was aglow, a fair-haired, happy-minded little creature in spite of her sorrows, moving from the cook-stove to the table and back again. Her face was flushed now from the heat of the pitch-wood blaze, and colored with a brightness which had never even shone on the cheeks of Lil. And it was such things as this that pulled Lafe back into reality, such things as those bright girlish cheeks, or perhaps the soft humming of some simple song as she moved about her work. Otherwise, Big Lafe sat in a cottage of his own, with Lil there before him, and with the gaunt specter of reality forgotten—Lil whose hands had caressed his sheepskin, whose lips had smiled, but whose words had turned him out into—

Then he would straighten and move uneasily in his chair. Once he rose and pulled down a curtain, which gave too free a view from the road. At last he moved clumsily to the girl's side.

"Plumb forgot what I was doin'," he mumbled. "I could have been settin' the table for you."

She smiled at him, with eyes which seemed brighter than in the afternoon, and pointed out the nearly bare shelves which contained the scanty supply of dishes. Once, halfway on a trip, he stopped and looked toward her, boyish, free for a moment of the deceit which formed his only excuse for being there, just Lafe Bradbury, tired, disheartened, broken Lafe Bradbury, voicing his gratitude for a smile and a friendly being:

"I'm sure enjoyin' this more'n I'll ever be able to tell. It gets awful lonely ridin' the hills."

She looked at him quickly, her eyes warm with a sudden communion.

"I know. We get so lonely here."

"Yessum. You tell 'em. Where did you say the saucers were? Yessum—I've got 'em."

Then he moved to the table again, while she came hurriedly from the stove, a hot plate of meat caught up on her apron.

"It's all ready now."

"Yessum."

"If you don't mind waiting until I take something in to Mother?"

"No'm. Yessum—maybe I could help you."

WITH her he went into the room where a faded woman lay, and acknowledged in stumbling fashion an introduction. As from far away he heard her gratitude to the express company, and mumbled an acknowledgment. Then back to the table—and to a meal such as he had dreamed of with Lil. A dream impossible, he knew, for Lil's hands had been too white and too dainty for cooking, for anything save to touch his shoulders or pat his face when she joked with him.

They talked as they sat there eating, first about the father who lay awaiting death in Denver, then of other things, of the approach of spring, the scarcity of snow in the higher hills, of the advent of the robins and the first swelling of the lilac buds. Gradually it all veered to the make-believe trip he must make, and of his kindness in coming there. At last:

"Have you worked for the express company long?"

"Me? No'm. Not long. I'm more fitted to ranchin', and cow-punchin'."

"Oh!" There was the enthusiasm of a common ground in her eyes as she leaned toward him. "Do you like it?"

"Yessum. There aint anything better'n the creakin' of stirrup-leathers on a round-up."

"I've always wanted that sort of thing. I'd love it."

"Yessum. And—yessum—some way or other, cow-people seem kind of different, too. Homey, you know—like this. Then there's a lot of fun, too. Always playin' pranks and jokes and such. Say nothin' of gettin' all busted up at Cheyenne in the contests."

"You've been in them?"

"Oh, yessum!" Then an outlaw vanished—vanished to give way to Lafe Bradbury, ex-cow-puncher, to the thrill of the dust-swept field at Cheyenne, the swish

of the lariat in the roping contests, the crashing impact of the bulldogging, the smack of leather as a sunfisher struggled his utmost against a would-be master in the fight for the bucking honors, the blare of the bands, the long varicolored stretches of the grandstands, the shouts, the clanging ambulance—Lafe Bradbury found himself talking with an enthusiasm, a freedom and an ease he had never known, even with Lil, and certainly with no other feminine creature. It was more as though she were a little girl, sitting there beside him, a trustful child intent on the every word of a good-night story.

And with a strange, fleeting happiness, Lafe talked of range and round-up, and the glad call of grub from the chuck-wagon, of the long forty-mile circles in the garnering of a ranchman's riches, of the stars hanging low over the valleys, of the round-up fire and the freedom and the joy of a fast horse on a crisp morning. But suddenly he halted and stared at the wall. The old clock, with its bent hands and faded face, was striking nine! Embarrassed, grim for the moment, he rose.

"Guess I'd better be gettin' along. I never thought it was so late."

"I—I didn't, either." She was holding forth a hand. "I wish—you could stop by again."

"Yessum, Yessum. I'd love to!"

Then he stumbled out through the door, out into the black-blueness of night, and to the horse that was waiting at the gate to take him to a cavern in the hills.

HOWEVER, once he had reached his hiding-place, he made no quick preparations for departure. Instead, his horse beside him, he stood looking down into the valley, and at a single window which gleamed there—his last memory of happiness. An hour passed. The light faded; only a black valley remained. Lafe Bradbury turned slowly within the tunnel, and began to roll his bed. But with his work half done, he halted.

"Seems if they were comin' over this way, they'd have been here by now."

The thought repeated in his mind. Slowly the bedding was unrolled. . . . . When morning came again, faint sunlight struggling through a gradual massing of gray, Lafe stood again in the aspens, watching the figure of a girl moving about her chores, down there in the valley. And when she came over the ridge that afternoon on the return from town, Lafe Bradbury once more swung into the saddle.

He knew as he did it that risks were before him, risks of what she might have heard in Tall Pine, risks of what might be hidden in the surrounding hills. But in spite of it he went down the mountainside, to move again to the road as she approached, and to await her, his big hat swinging beside him.

"Got so late last night, I thought I'd better stay over at Georgeville," he announced. "Yessum. Never meant to keep you up that way."

"But you didn't." She smiled happily; Lafe knew she was glad to see him. He loosed a foot from the stirrup.

"Swing on behind?" Then as she came to the horse, "How's your dad?"

"Still no change. They have news of the robber, though. The papers say the sheriff knows who did it."

"Who's that?" Gnawing fear seized him.

"A man named Lafe Bradbury. It seems he confessed, then ran away. You don't know him?"

Lafe fought against sudden huskiness.

"Yessum. I know him."

"Do you think they'll get him? I hope so!"

"Can't tell. He's an awful good rider. Kind of hard to tell."

He looked toward the hills. They beckoned him, called to him. The sky above threatened him. But a hand was on his shoulder—and he rode on.

On to the gate, to the moment of hesitation, to her smile and her invitation again. To the glowing lamp and the pitch-wood burning in the squatty stove. To another meal, to the watching of her and to the happiness of a home, even though he might be an interloper within it. To the clearing of the table, and him standing there beside her at the pan, clumsily attempting to wipe the dishes as she washed them. Then back to the lamp again, and to stories of the range and hill, to hours which moved swiftly, hours in which Lil seemed not to arise as often as in the times of his loneliness up there in the tunnel. Again the old clock struck nine. Again he rose and touched her hand.

"It's sure good-by this time." He tried to laugh but failed. "I've plumb enjoyed myself!" And, suddenly blurting, he voiced that ever new, ever old thing which once in a lifetime comes unbidden and hon-

estly to a man's lips: "I never met anybody just like you."

THEN, his embarrassment clouding even the words of her reply, he went out to his horse, to look over his shoulder at the gleaming light of the window as he rode away, to forget the new shrillness of the wind, the heaviness of the air, the whining of the pines, to move hazily up the mountain-side toward the first draw which would give an easier ascent, to turn slowly into it—then to galvanize! A horse whinnied not fifty yards away. Some one shouted. Forms moved. Hoofs scratched on the rocky soil; a spark flew from the contact of flint and horseshoe. The posse!

A quick swerve to the right, a forcing onward, born of desperation. A horse which stumbled beneath him, but which floundered on, to climbs and leaps any one of which might be the last. But the luck held. The ridge—and the sound of horsemen far beneath him. He doubled on his trail, and they were lost again. Aspens ahead. He avoided them—they would crackle. The vague outline of a cliff—he made for it, riding along its very edge, his spurs cutting deep as the horse faltered. Then he rounded it, scrambling through the black dangers of the descent to its first ledge. There, under the roofing of rock, he waited. The cludding and scratching of hoofs moved steadily farther away, back on the trail to Georgeville.

A long interval, while the wind cut through his clothing, and fanned the mane of his mount against his rein hand. The shrill of the pines grew louder. He could progress now with little danger of being heard, and he moved forward, carefully, yet swiftly, at last to reach the tunnel, and there to lead his mount far into its interior. An hour's wait, to give his hunters sufficient time to travel far from a warm trail, and he must make his start. So the minutes dragged by, while the old cavern echoed eerily the bluster without, and drafts of chilling cold swept within. At last the man moved forward, to halt in the darkness and to brush at something soft and damp which had been borne to his face by the inrush of the gale. He breathed heavily—then went swiftly for the tunnel opening, there to stand, staring. Lafe Bradbury had waited too long; the ground, the air, the trees, were white with the swift falling blanket of a blizzard!

Vainly he stumbled forth in a faint hope of reconnoitering, of determination on a possible sally. But the wind and snow blinded him—five minutes of stumbling and struggling only brought him back to the tunnel opening again, beaten. To fight against the raging snow, cover his trail though it might, was an impossibility. His attempt on foot had only resulted in collisions with trees, sharp falls over jutting rocks, and sliding scrambles down the mountain-side. Winter—with its characteristic tenacity of the mountain climate—had returned for its final fling, for the one last outburst which seems inevitable in the hill country before spring can come assured. Lafe knew what it meant—a deep fall of snow, lasting perhaps for twenty-four hours, which would leave the whole mountain country drifted in white, and form a barrier against his escape, possibly for days. And now Lafe Bradbury had no time to wait!

"If it'll only keep up till mornin'!" he exclaimed as he watched the swirling world of white about him. "I can see then—I can take the chance!"

He moved back into the tunnel, but not to sleep. His bedding rolled, his grub-sack packed, he waited throughout the night for dawn to come. But when the first streaks showed, he only moved back into the tunnel again. The storm had subsided for a time. Stars spluttered through the spotty clouds; the wind still moaned, but the snow had ceased.

Full morning. The sun for a moment—then the clouds again. Lafe watched them hopefully. All morning they massed with short flurries which ended almost before they began, with heavy threatenings of blackness, then with stretches of clearness again. Lafe was grateful for one thing: down in the valley he could see a girl moving about her chores.

Noon, and brilliant sunlight, but it was only an interim—the dun of the sky behind that sun was settling into a straight conformity now, as though the storm were marshaling its every force for its final outbreak. Down in the valley the girl left the house and started along the drifted roadway toward town.

"Ought to be down there helpin' her. That road's drifted deep—"

Then words ceased. For the girl had been blotted out—swept from sight by a swirl of drifting snow which had clouded from the hills above him, mingling with the first onrush of the breaking storm.

The white had come again, driving on the breast of a new gale, veiling the mountains, even shutting out the first of the pines, a hundred yards away. Lafe turned for his horse.

It was his chance. But as he came from the mine tunnel, he did not head for the trail which led to the high country. Instead he swung for the valley, and the road which lay there, forcing his horse in spite of the knowledge that its every reserve should be spared, struggling anxiously, vainly for short-cuts, dismounting when the going appeared too dangerous, that he might lead the frightened, snorting animal to safer paths. In his mind was the consolation that this was the surer course, anyway, that in any event his hopes could not lie in the land beyond the high country until the snows should melt, that his task was to break into the next range and there find a place of concealment where he might look after the comfort of his horse until such time as he could essay the final sally over the divide. But even above the plans of his own safety, there surged the thought that a girl who had been good to him was somewhere on the road to Tall Pine, ill-clothed against the blasts of wind, struggling afoot in the grip of a blizzard.

HE rode swiftly, once he had reached the valley, searching futilely for the fording spot where he had been wont to cross the stream, only to find that the storm had changed the appearance of his surroundings. Soon he knew that he was far past the usual crossing, and forced to search out a new one. But the stream was deep and rushing; a mile, then a mile more intervened before the young torrent broadened to negotiable depth. Out to the road he hurried, straining his eyes against the rush of the storm. In vain.

He had passed her—he felt it instinctively. But as he wheeled his horse for the back trail, the slightest lifting of the storm gave him the sight of a black object in the snow far toward the top of the ridge, that was blotted out as swiftly. Now, however, was not a time for aimless wanderings or conjectures. That spot meant a human; she must be the only person on the road—afoot, at least. So again the horse whirled to buck the drifts, to snort and blow, and at last to head slowly up the last pitch of the long grade. A shout came from the snow-veil:

"Hello—who's there?"

It was a man's voice. Lafe Bradbury's hands caught tight at his snow-dampened rifle—then slowly loosed. Even were it the posse, he knew he would not shoot. He did not answer. Again the call:

"Hey there—going toward Kendall's?"

"Who's that?"

"Station agent. Got a telegram for the Kendalls. Thought I'd meet somebody on the road."

Lafe rode forward then, and a moment later halted his horse beside a snow-whitened form.

"Bad news?" He asked it between tight lips. The other man laughed.

"No—good. That's why I was in a hurry to get it out there. Found the bullet in the old man. It was pressing on something—all right now. Get well, I guess."

"I'll take it." Lafe Bradbury reached for the damp message and thrust it into a pocket. Then, suddenly light-hearted, suddenly forgetful of dangers, even of his troubles, he turned on the back trail toward the form he sought.

Far down the road he found her, staggering, almost breathless, nearly beaten, floundering helplessly in a waist-deep drift, her shoulders sagging, her strength all but exhausted. He shouted to her—and she waved feebly as he rode nearer. Then with a leap, he went from his saddle, caught her up as though she were a child, held her in his arms for a moment, and grinned at her with all the boyish happiness that a man can know.

"Got good news for you! Yessum—good news! Your dad's all right. Goin' to get well!"

Her eyes widened. She smiled—a smile that faded swiftly into the laxity of momentary unconsciousness. Her head rested against his shoulder; a hand trailed in the deep drift.

"Poor little kid!" Lafe droned it. "Oughtn't yelled at her that way—took her off her feet. Tired, anyhow."

But then he brightened. Her eyes had opened; she attempted weakly to move in his embrace.

"You got a telegram?"

"Just what I've got. Wait till I set you up there in the saddle."

HE pulled forth the message and stood grinning delightedly at the play of her features as she read it, the brightness of her eyes, the curves of her smiling lips.

She turned to him almost childishly, radiant:

"He'll get well. He's sure to get well!"

"'Course he is. Guess we'd better hurry back with that, hadn't we? It ought to do your maw a heap of good."

"Oh, it will—it will!"

"Nothin' like gettin' started then!"

He took the reins and moved in front of the horse, his head bowed against the sweep of the storm. The snow was growing lighter; there were moments when it almost ceased; nor was the onslaught so fierce when it began again. A mile—the little house came dimly into view. A quarter more—then Lafe halted short. Three men had ridden into the road from the shelter of the cottonwoods along the stream-edge, three men who blocked the road, one in the center, one on each side. The breath pulled shrill and whistling over Lafe Bradbury's teeth. He swayed. Then his shoulders drooped; suddenly old, suddenly haggard, he pulled again at the reins, and went soddenly forward to meet them. The center rider rested a hand on his holster.

"Hello, Lafe," came the quiet greeting.

"Hello, Tom."

"You're not goin' to use that thing you've got in your hand?"

"Me?" Lafe Bradbury looked at his rifle, then handed it up, by its barrel. "No—I wouldn't do that, Tom."

"Thought not, Lafe. Bill wants you."

"Yeh, I know. Mind goin'—" he strove to turn his head toward the girl and failed—"up to that little house with me, Tom? This lady lives there."

"Sure not, Lafe."

THEY fell in beside and in front of him, a silent group surrounding a silent man and woman. They reached the gateway, then head down, eyes averted, Lafe moved to the side of the horse and put up a hand. But she already had dismounted, and was standing there, looking at him with curious, swimming eyes, eyes which held doubt and anxiety and trouble, which bored him through, it seemed.

"Lafe," she questioned haltingly, "you're not Lafe Bradbury?"

He shuffled a foot in the snow. "Yes—yessum."

"And these men—"

"They're Bill's—deputies from Georgeville."

"You're Lafe Bradbury?" She said it again as though she did not understand. Then with sudden intensity she caught at his sleeve. "But you didn't do it, did you?"

He could not answer. Her fingers went deep into his arm.

"You couldn't have done it—you couldn't have done it and then come here this way!"

But Lafe Bradbury only stared at the snow, and the booted foot which slowly shuffled there. A long silence.

"Did you?" The tone was sharp, commanding. Lafe Bradbury cleared his throat. He strove to speak—to voice the confession—but the words would not come. A hand touched his chin, raising his head, forcing his eyes at last to look into hers. "Did you do it, Lafe?"

And this time there was the compassion of a woman in the tones, a woman fearing to hear the answer to her question, yet a woman convinced by her own intuition that she in her heart, knew the truth. The lips of the big man trembled. The lie would not come.

"Why don't you answer me, Lafe?" She used the name as though she had used it always. "Aren't you man enough to admit it?"

"I—I'd like to tell you about it sometime," he said huskily. "Honest—I've got to go now." He turned, and pulled his horse after him; nor did he look back. "I guess we're ready, Tom."

Silently he joined the three men. Silently they ferreted out the trail to Georgeville and ascended the ridge. Big Lafe asked no questions—there were none to ask. Two hours later he sat in the office of the sheriff, waiting until the ruddy-faced Bill should finish the reading of a voluminous sheetage of writing before him. At last, the final page completed, the officer whirled in his chair and laid a chubby hand on Big Lafe's knee.

"Well, you brown-eyed old fool," he asked brusquely, "what'd you do it for?"

THE jaws of the larger man hardened. He gripped at his chair—fighting to drive out the memory of a pair of eyes, struggling with all the man that was in him to stand true to a trust. At last:

"I—I wanted the money, Bill."

"Money? I aint talkin' about money. What'd you come down here an' stick that knife in my door for?"

"Well, I done it, and I—"

But the other man laughed—only to become serious again.

"That aint goin' to get you nowhere, Lafe. Not when we've got both of 'em back there, an' their names signed to this."

"Both?" He stared. "Both—both who?"

"Ed and the woman."

"Lil?"

"Lil? Of course, Lil! You don't think he figured that out alone, do you? You bet, Lil—Lil Jordan, alias Lil Anderson, alias Lil Mandrake, alias Kansas Lil. Ed's got as long a record as she has. They didn't have you really mixed in it, did they, Lafe?"

"I—I—" But that was all. The room was swimming. The face of the sheriff before him only a blur. "I—"

"They didn't mix you in it—really, did they, Lafe?"

But Big Lafe Bradbury could only gulp. The sheriff went on:

"Then is this true—what they've told: that you got the goods on Ed, there, an' because you were crazy over this Lil, an' thought she was straight an' wanted to marry Ed, you took the blame? That's what they've come through to, an' I just want to straighten it out. That's all, Lafe. Naturally, you didn't know he'd made a break-away from the Cañon City road-gang when he came into your cabin when you was sick. Neither'd we until he confessed to it. Didn't know who Lil was, either, until we made him break down. Didn't even know a thing about their plans. Wouldn't have, I guess, if it hadn't been for you."

"Me?"

"Yeh, Lafe. She's layin' low too—or has been. Want her in Denver. They've been married five years—that's where they outslicked everybody. The reward sheets all called for man an' wife. But Ed stayed with you, an' she pulled the single-woman racket. Would've worked, too, if it hadn't been for you."

"Me?" It was all he could say.

"Yeh." Then the sheriff turned back to his desk and drummed on it with his fingers for a moment, then turned to face again his wondering prisoner. "Guess I'm a fool to do it, Lafe, but I'm goin' to let you in on that reward money. Half an' half, Lafe. They'd have got away on us sure if it hadn't been for what you did. I always did call you a brown-eyed old fool. Guess that's what made me get the idea so quick. Of course, the minute I saw that writin' of yours, I sent Tom an' the boys out to bring you in. My head wasn't workin' right, I guess, because they hadn't more'n gone when somethin' began thrashin' aroun' in my brain. Then all of a sudden I called back the reward-sheet I'd ordered printed. I'd got it! But they wasn't any way to stop Tom. He'd gone—an' you know how he is, Lafe. Stay out till the last dog dies."

"Yeh—I know."

"But they wasn't any use in it. I've told him that before, that he ought to call up th' office once in a while; but it don't do no good with Tom. Because the minute I had time to think, it was clear as a bell. Just as plain as a full-house, Lafe. I knew who'd done it—an' we caught 'em a half-hour later, packin' up for a getaway. Didn't take more'n five minutes of rummagin' around the office here to dig up a 'wanted' description. After that, it was easy.

"You see, Lafe, the papers don't get everything. There was just one little detail the reporters missed. Old man Kendall had a mighty poor description. But there was one thing that he was sure of—when that masked bandit leaned over him to go through his pockets—hey, pay attention to what I'm sayin', you brown-eyed old idjut—when that masked bandit leaned over, as I say, old man Kendall seen somethin' that he didn't tell nobody but me. An' that was a pair o' the steeliest steel-blue eyes he'd ever looked at! Have a cigar, Lafe?"

THE man in the other chair accepted wordlessly. He stared about him, as though without realization of his surroundings or of the things he had heard. He turned slowly, the cigar crushed in his big hands. His gaze sought the window—and he stared without, suddenly to brighten. A stiffness, a new strength seemed to come into his shoulders. He rose—he pointed, and the sheriff rose to stand beside him.

"Lord, Bill, look! Pretty—aint it?"

For the snow had ceased again, and the clouds had broken, just enough for the sunset to play against their bankings, just enough for the gold and purple and molten copper to paint the hills, and to set aglow their ragged tops—where lay the trail to Bitter Gulch.

THE END

Free Lances in Diplomacy

"The Oriental Menace" describes one of the most daring adventures ever undertaken by the Free Lances. Only Mr. New, with his remarkable knowledge of international affairs and of conditions in out-of-the-way places, could have written this exceptional story.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

IT is difficult to fix the exact moment when a diplomatic *coup* may be said to have had its beginning, because the origin of any particular development in international relations is usually obscure—often a chance word which starts some diplomat thinking along a certain line.

Although Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan had made the journey over the Trans-Siberian to ascertain for his own information whether conditions were getting better or worse throughout Russia, it is possible that the game which he and Earl Trevor went into, regardless of its prohibitory risk, might never have been played if the two Cabinet ministers who were dining at the Earl's famous mansion in Park Lane upon the evening of his return to London had been less well-informed than they were, or not sufficiently far-sighted to realize that the immediate menace in European conditions was overshadowed by a greater, though less imminent, one in the Far East. So this particular *coup* may be said to have had its beginning in the Premier's speech concerning the Ruhr in the House.

Trevor and Countess Nan, as usual, were letting their dinner-guests do most of the talking—partly because it was their fixed policy always to let others express the decided opinions upon any subject while they remained noncommittal as long as possible and thereby gained the reputation of taking far less interest in State affairs than they actually did. They were also a trifle preoccupied, this evening, with their pleasure in having their old friend and companion safely back with them after what they knew to have been an exceedingly hazardous trip. It was Sir Abdool himself who—struck by a remark from one of the ministers—presently asked:

"In all this reparations talk against the Ruhr policy—in your Downing Street conferences—has there been no definite consideration of the Japanese question?"

"Er—just which one have you reference to, Sir Abdool?"

"There's but one great one—Japan's diplomatic understanding with the British Empire. It is generally understood, today, that you've scrapped the former Anglo-

Japanese Treaty; but if you've actually done so without some 'gentlemen's agreement' underneath, it's one of the greatest blunders Downing Street has ever made."

"But—my dear sir! Consider the Dominions!"

"Oh, I know all that! Australia bars Japs; Canada bars Hindus, Malays and Japs; the Cape bars, yet admits, pretty much everything! But there should have been found some way to get around those objections and still maintain a defensive alliance with Japan in the East. Because—if there hasn't been—it drives Japan, in self-defense, to seek alliance with whatever party happens to be in control in Russia. And that means, when ruin and self-interest bring about an exploitation of Russia by Germany—as is now steadily progressing—that we have a Russo-German-Japanese Entente with almost unlimited natural resources—with probably the teeming millions of China to draw upon for army material. And it gives color to what I learned in Moscow."

"What was that, Sir Abdool?"

"Well—it is generally believed that secret conversations have taken place with Japanese representatives in Moscow during a period of several months—and that matters have reached a point where two exceptionally intelligent Bolshevists are in daily conference with Soviet heads—being groomed and coached for a stay of several months in Tokio, where they will engage in conversations with the Genru and the younger statesmen. It is known that the Japs will be almost impossible to fool with any statements as to war-material and resources,—commercial or agricultural conditions,—because their spies have been from Archangel to Odessa—Brest-Litovsk to Vladivostok; and they know the exact conditions in Russia. On the other hand, two men who know the general trend throughout Europe and are empowered to block out any sort of alliance they may deem expedient, would be very well received in Tokio and get a pretty close idea as to just how far Japan will go—if they're smart enough, and are sufficiently well-coached in Oriental obliquity before they start. It is said they'll be ready in another month—and that Tokio knows they're coming."

"They'll go as a special embassy, one supposes—with as impressive a suite as the Reds can get up?"

"On the contrary, Your Lordship! The Soviet heads know that would attract immediate attention—insure there being a swarm of spies in Tokio—get the whole matter into the news-sheets and practically kill its force with publicity before there is time to perfect the scheme and get it fairly organized."

"But—it's generally supposed that some kind of a secret understanding already exists between Japan and Russia."

"An understanding which could never be really threatening as long as Japan and Britain had any sort of agreement under the rose. But Tokio now definitely assumes that all such understanding is wiped out—and so now they're looking about to strengthen their position. They don't, however, care any more for publicity in their search than the Reds do. Back-stairs conversations decidedly appeal to them at present."

TREVOR interposed a question here:

"Did you by any chance find out who the two Bolshevists were, Abdool? The two who are being coached for Tokio?"

"That was naturally my first impulse—but it got me in deeper than I expected. I had to impersonate one of the Black Cossacks and do some fancy riding, standing up in the saddle, before I was accepted as a Red in sufficiently good standing to be trusted with Soviet confidences—and when I got out of Russia, I believe the Cheka were looking for me. The secret envoys are Marakanoff, an extreme radical who was formerly a university professor, and Lodjeski, who was a correspondence-clerk in a large Petrograd exporting house—speaks and writes six languages. You see, when the Reds have occasion to look about for creditable representatives to send anywhere outside, with important work to accomplish, they're rather up against it—the pick of such material having been shot by the hundred thousand in the pits and cellars. But by raking and scraping the prisons, the department executives in various localities, they do get a few men who aren't altogether fools or crude to an impossible extent. Marakanoff and Lodjeski are far above the average in brain-capacity, as you'll infer from these snapshots I got of them. Later I made a suggestion to one of the commissars that good photographs should accompany their credentials to prevent all possibility of substitution or mistaken identity—and he thought the idea so good that he had the photographer I

recommended take them from various angles. I got into that photographer's garret one night and stole a few of the prints. There were even some taken with bare faces, after temporarily shaving off their shrubbery—just to allow for all possible contingencies."

"My word, Sir Abdool! You must have run a frightful risk! Why did you bother with it? Of what possible value are those photographs compared to being tortured or killed, as you jolly well might have been?"

SIR ABDOOL lighted a fresh cigar and took a few thoughtful puffs before he smilingly replied:

"Well—it occurred to me that if some of your Foreign Office men happened to be suffering for a bit of excitement, they might impersonate those envoys—waylay them at some point along the Trans-Siberian, put them out of business in some effective way, and go on to Japan with their credentials. As long as there is to be no suite accompanying them,—probably none on the same train who would know them but their valets,—such a substitution wouldn't be altogether impossible. Of course, the chances would be a hundred to one against its success, and the risk so great that few sane men would care to attempt it; but—think what such impersonators *might* learn as to the real secret policy of Japan—how far she would risk going in any particular direction, what dreams of world-conquest may be working in the brains of her ablest men today!"

"Oh, the devil! Such a thing is quite too foolhardy even to discuss! Still an' all, though—I fancy you're right as to what such men *could* learn if they pulled it off successfully, which of course is impossible! Again—even supposing Governm'nt were considering anything of the sort—eh? I say! Could you mention two in the F. O. who might have any chance at all at that sort of game? I can think of none—and I know the personnel, I fancy!"

"Well—no. None of the present staff would qualify, I fear. Several of them speak Russian and some of the dialects well enough—but not the ones who are really good at Nipponese. Of course, none of the Japs would expect a Bolshevist to understand their language fluently—I'm positive that neither Marakanoff nor Lodjeski are well up on it; but your F. O. men would get a good bit more if they did understand it fairly well. There is a man who was formerly the best King's Messenger in a century, but he hasn't been connected with the Foreign Office for several years—probably wouldn't care to undertake such a game at all. He's well past fifty, though physically as active as a man twenty years younger. I can also think of two more whose equipment of languages, nerve, resource and experience would give them a chance of pulling through—but even if they were successful, it would be a thankless job!"

"Aye—that's the worst of such work! It's so immensely valuable that one undertaking it should be entitled to almost anything in Governm'nt's power to give him—yet it's the sort of thing impossible to recognize, publicly. To be sure—honors of many sorts and a good bit of income with them have been conferred upon certain men when nothing which is known to the public seemed to warrant it. The Cabinet is often accused of rank favoritism—but those on the inside know that the men got little enough for what they'd jolly well earned. H-m-m—one rather wishes that you hadn't made the suggestion, Sir Abdool! Because, the more one considers it, the more it appears that two such men, if successful, might arouse the Allied cabinets so thoroughly with the menace of Oriental consolidation as to brush aside all the petty differences which appear to be driftin' us into another beastly war unless the misunderstandings are in some way checked."

"And one peculiar feature of the situation is that they would probably discover some inwardness of conditions which will come as a surprise to the Western nations. Have you ever heard of Rudolph Koffe?"

"H-m-m—the name is vaguely familiar. A Soviet propagandist in China, is he not?"

"You might call him that. You might also call him a publicly accredited envoy to Japan—for that's what he amounts to in Tokio. The man has possibly one of the cleverest brains among all of the Soviet officials. He has been lecturing in the Chinese universities—learned a smattering both of Chinese and English in a few months. And what he is everlastingly preaching is a renaissance of Asiatic culture as the oldest and best in the world, including its philosophies. By avoiding all suggestion of military alliances, playing up 'Asia for the Asiatics' in a peaceful bond of culture and mutual interests, he has done more than any other man to solidify a liking in China for everything Russian.

By the amazingly rapid increase of this influence, he has startled Japan into a position where she must throw in with such a movement—or oppose it. German emissaries in the East are backing this play in every way they can while they unceasingly build up German-controlled Asiatic development of industrial enterprises.

"From another angle—Japan has always admired German thoroughness and military efficiency—has copied them in many ways. A thousand mutual interests draw them together. Consequently, when she sees Russia and China getting thicker every day, with Germany persistently obtaining control of industrial development, is it any wonder that the force of such a combination appeals to the Nipponese mind? An international combination of unlimited resources, which can put an army of twenty million men into the field as soon as the consolidation becomes really effective! The Chinese hate war; consequently, the Soviets allay their suspicions of any ulterior object with talk of a cultural renaissance which appeals very strongly to the Chinese. But after a few years of close association and development between Russia, China, Germany and Japan, *Russia* knows, *Japan* knows and *Germany* knows, that no military power in the world can stop them from overrunning and controlling the rest of it.

"Of course, this four-power consolidation is not yet accomplished fact. It is probably within the power of Western diplomacy to draw its teeth, if the drawing is done within the next five or ten years. But unless Europe and America wake up to the situation, they'll lose whatever chance they *may* have to stop it. Japan is by no means thoroughly decided upon just how far she will go in such a direction as yet; there are various considerations which influence her against the chance of surrendering her present domination of Asiatic affairs and becoming merely one of four. That is why —with Koffe as the envoy in evidence— Marakanoff and Lodjeski are being sent very quietly, with no flourish of trumpets and no accompanying suite, to follow up whatever Koffe may have started in a more public way. Of course, neither of them is in his class as to brains or intelligence,— that is, they didn't strike me as being so when I talked with them and overheard other conversations which I wasn't supposed to hear,—but they don't need to be. Their business is to find out just how far Japan is willing to commit herself at present, and size up the general feeling among the people toward such an alliance."

"Hmph! You make it appear even more vitally necessary that we somehow learn what those secret envoys actually get, Sir Abdool! But I must admit that you also demonstrate the apparent impossibility of getting it in any such way as you suggested. That's but a wild dream— a joke! We must send two of our ablest Foreign Office men to Japan at once, and see if we can't form some opinion of what's going on under the surface!"

WHEN the ministers had left the house, the Trevors and Sir Abdool remained in the big Jacobean library examining topographical maps of Asia—not saying much, but doing a lot of concentrated thinking. Trevor, lighting one of his long brown cigars, began slowly pacing up and down before the hearth; Countess Nan curled up in a big leather chair.

"Abdool—had you any definite idea of kidnaping those envoys when you left Moscow? Did you go as far as making any arrangement for getting word of their departure?"

"I had no real intention of getting hold of them within Russian territory—hadn't considered that it might be possible. But I *was* of the impression that some of the best men in Downing Street would be sent to Japan, and that it would be an advantage to know just when those envoys started. As it happens, there are four men in Russia just now who are under heavy obligations to me—enough to risk a good deal at my request. Each of them agreed to get a radiogram through to London—a perfectly simple business message which the censors will pass. One from Moscow, one from Samara, one from Tchita—messages which they will try to duplicate, with altered wording, to a certain man in Vladivostok whose daughter I once got out of a pretty serious situation."

"So that if three or four reckless fools *should* happen to be somewhere between— say—Omsk and Tchita, it would be possible, somehow, to get in touch with those four and keep track of the envoys' movements, mile by mile, clear across Siberia?"

"Entirely possible—but always with the chance that messages would be delayed or suppressed altogether."

"Oh, naturally—that's all in the game! Now—how about a reason for the fools

being in Siberia? Of course, passports are always an unknown quantity—also the suspicions and activities of the Cheka; but our news syndicate has had less difficulty of late in getting its men through, with proper credentials. What would you say as to that? Is there a disposition to pass foreigners about the country with less risk and espionage than during the last six years?"

"Since Lenine's illness some of the more far-sighted leaders appear to have realized that without capital and credit from the outside, Russia is drifting toward utter chaos. So they're exercising some restraint over the Cheka, in the case of foreign bankers and promoters—making some effort to protect and impress them. With your hundreds of different enterprises, O friend of my father's son, it should not be difficult to provide credentials for three or four men, as a delegation to examine certain districts in Siberia with the view of organizing developing companies—mining, manufacturing, farming. It would appear entirely plausible for such men to go over the Trans-Siberian, with frequent stop-offs to inspect different localities. If two of them go as engineers, it would be quite reasonable for such men to make borings in various places for oil and mineral indications—which would take a little time—account for their staying a few weeks in one spot. In fact, a request from Downing Street to what they dignify with the name Foreign Office, in Moscow, would undoubtedly secure as much of a safe-conduct as the Soviet can give such promoters—"

"It probably would—but Downing Street can't make any such request! If the men happen to be caught in any mix-up with those envoys, it brands them at once as British secret-service men trying to block Russian politics! Downing Street must be kept entirely out of it! Your adventurous fools must tackle the game entirely on their own. But I'm thinking that if they requested an interview with the Soviet representatives in London, as shareholders in a large British development syndicate,—we could get for them letters which would be quite convincing,—the Russians would put themselves out a good bit to encourage any such tour of inspection. And they'd fall for the request that no publicity whatever be given it—no entertainment of the delegates, no chaperons to conduct them from one place to another and show them the natural possibilities. For it's supposable that many British and foreign development companies have exactly the same thing in mind—would be shadowing those delegates, step by step, if they once got on their track, to see what possibilities they were discovering and use such information, themselves."

"That might work! Yes—I fancy you could depend upon it. Oh—I hadn't wasted much thought over getting such adventurers into almost any part of Russia—because it can be done if one cares to accept the personal risk, which exists none the less in spite of any protection which may be promised. But after getting them there, the actual kidnaping of the envoys and substitution of your adventurers is something else again—something far more dangerous and difficult."

"Suppose the men were in Moscow a week or more before those men started—had a chance to study them closely, and the servants who would probably accompany them?"

"You'd have to suppose that—or else start them all on the same train. They'll be at least two or three weeks on the road before they reach Vladivostok."

"By thunder, Abdool — I'm almost tempted to have a try at this! And I'll bet Lammy'll want to go with us! Such a game would call for every bit of finesse and resource one has—'twould be worth playing for the game alone. But if successful, it *might* go a long way toward blocking any such consolidation of Eastern interests as we fear. How—I don't know! Time enough for that when we know something of Japanese ambitions or aspirations for the next hundred years—and the chance of any such coalition sticking together long enough to become the menace we fear. What do you say, Nan—shall we try it?"

"Speaking for myself alone, George, I'd say emphatically *no!* You've done enough in the last twenty years to be exempt from any duty of this sort—admitting that it *is* a duty under present conditions. We've all been hoping that the time is approaching when we can drop international politics for good and settle down to a quieter, happier life with our own simple interests. But—there's another side to it. There's no man in the F. O. who would stand any chance of winning out in such an adventure, none with the necessary training and experience, and cold nerve in emergencies—though there are some pretty able men in the Service. So if the object is really

great enough—it would appear to be either us or nobody. I wont mess in it myself—I don't want either of you to do it! Still, if you should pull it off, the value of the service is something way beyond measuring in money. Eventually, I suppose, each one of us will do something of this sort once too often—but I fancy we should be willing to pass out just on the record of what we've already done. It's a good bit—when one adds it up!"

FOR over a month Serge Marakanoff and Ignace Lodjeski had occupied a room in the Kremlin where they spent days and evenings in going over maps, documents—being coached in regard to the personalities of various Japanese statesmen whom they would meet—devoting a good deal of intensive study to acquiring enough of that language to carry on a conversation intelligently or catch side-remarks which they were not supposed to hear. Marakanoff, with his former university experience, found this much easier than his colleague, because when one has mastered two or three alien languages so that he writes and speaks them fluently, acquiring others becomes increasingly easy. To Americans, the learning of another tongue is a task of great difficulty, from the fact that they consider it superfluous cultivation rather than necessary equipment. But to Europeans, with five or six different languages in use just the other side of their borders, it is a necessity to familiarize themselves with such other tongues. In fact, it is common enough to meet a person in one's railway compartment who switches to any one of five or six languages without effort, and even thinks in them.

A week before the two were to leave Moscow, they met—at one of the few popular restaurants which manage to serve a fairly decent meal—three Englishmen who were making a tour of investigation for a big development syndicate. One of these had drifted easily into a discussion of people and conditions in Tokio—betraying a familiarity with Japan which he admitted was the result of several years' residence in the country. He appeared to have met and known almost all of the prominent statesmen, business magnates and tea-growers, mentioning one after another with little personal details which Marakanoff knew from his own intensive study were exceedingly accurate. The more he thought of it, the more it seemed to him a rare opportunity for getting additional information along just the lines covered by his mission. He insisted that the three accompany him back to the Kremlin for the purpose of meeting certain commissars and leaders belonging to the inner Soviet circle.

After some hesitation they consented—and the talk in a Kremlin room, with its high vaulted ceiling and remnants of once luxurious furnishings, lasted far into the night. Although the Englishmen were leaving for Omsk very shortly, the envoys managed to see them for a good part of the next five days and secured a promise that they would join them again on the Trans-Siberian train at Omsk—going as far as Irkutsk or Tchita. The one little point in this recent acquaintance which the envoys overlooked was that they had seen nothing of a fourth Englishman who belonged to the syndicate party. Some reference had been made to him as an able engineer, but there was nothing to indicate that he would be of any use to them. The two servants who were going along, however, did run across this man once or twice in small eating-places—paying no close attention to him beyond answering some of his questions about the city and remembering his face when he left Moscow on the same train with their party. At two or three stations before the train passed Samara, they saw him stretching his legs on the platform and chatted with him. At Samara they suggested fetching his luggage into their compartment and joining them in a game of cards—two strangers happening to leave the train at that point and making room in the compartment for the servants, the Englishman, and a subordinate official who was going as far as the next stop.

THE Englishman was good company—played a good game, minded his own business, and understood only enough Russian to play cards with them intelligently. They were quite sure that he couldn't understand their slang at all. He drank their vodka with them, and in turn produced a bottle of Scotch whisky which proved very acceptable. After the official left at the next station and the servants had gone up to the large double compartment in a forward car to see if the envoys wanted anything, the three had the compartment to themselves.

The next run was a longer one between stops—the train being supposed to be a

rapide—and the valets by this time were getting rather mellow. Knowing the line very well from trips over it in the days when *de-luxe* trains were among its advertised features, the Englishman recognized certain landmarks as they approached the next stop. About a minute before the train reached the station, his hand passed over the nearest vodka-cup in a careless gesture, as he stretched himself. The motion was so natural that nobody would have dreamed of watching it closely—yet a small capsule dropped into the fluid as the hand passed over it. In another moment one of the valets was gulping the stuff down and making ready to get out on the platform.

When the train stopped, his companion hurried up forward to the envoys' car—but he accepted the Englishman's suggestion that they cross the road back of the station and see if there was any decent pipe-tobacco to be had in a little shop on the other side. As they left the platform, they were followed by a man who seemed to recognize the tiny war-medal on the Englishman's lapel, and who entered the shop immediately after them. The valet, by this time, was feeling dull and stupid—could scarcely talk, became increasingly sleepy. In another moment he would have pitched down upon the floor if the last man to come in hadn't caught him, saying:

"It's just one of his spells—he is subject to them. He is Vassili Koraniev—just came in from Samara on the train. I'll get a droshky and take him to the house of his cousin, here!"

The Englishman appeared to hesitate a moment—then agreed.

"Oh, very good! If you're quite certain that he was stoppin' off here. I was playin' cards with him in the compartment—fancy he did say somethin' about this bein' his station."

Leaving the valet in the man's charge, the Englishman was going out of the shop when he caught a whisper from the stranger as he passed:

"There's no through train for three days, sir—I'll see that he doesn't get that! He'll not catch up with you anywhere along the line!"

WHEN the Englishman climbed into his compartment as the train was moving out, the other valet asked if he had seen Vassili anywhere.

"Why—he went across to that little shop for tobacco—and was then going up to the envoys' coupé to see if they wanted him for anything. Doubtless he was in their carriage when the train started."

"Hmph! He'll have an unpleasant time for the next hour if that's the case! We're not supposed to intrude upon the masters except at mealtime and bedtime, as they have much important work to do on the way. They should have had a secretary—but it was thought best not to send too many attendants, and they both use the typewriter."

AT the next stop Gregorovitch hurried up to the envoys' coupé in the hope of making things a bit easier for his fellow-valet, but found to his amazement that he hadn't been seen for three or four hours—the obvious presumption being that either he had been left behind or had tried to jump on the running-boards after the train was in motion and had fallen off, perhaps being seriously injured or killed. No telegram had come from the last station—inquiries by wire failed to obtain any trace of him. It was supposed by the envoys that Vassili would follow on by the next train, three days later, if he were in condition to come—but such a thing as waiting for him never occurred to them.

One would have thought that Gregorovitch might have become suspicious and been on the lookout for something to happen in his case—but he hadn't the intelligence to imagine any possible reason for such an occurrence. In fact, he never knew how or when he was drugged at another station along the line. When he recovered consciousness, he couldn't remember that anyone had been near him when he left the train and reeled into a small outhouse used for storing lamps. The Englishman remained alone in the compartment after the train started—going through the valet's luggage very carefully and abstracting every paper or document which might be of use to him, then putting everything carefully back so that the suitcases gave no appearance of having been disturbed. He changed into another compartment at the next stop and was playing cards with two Germans when the guard came along the running-board to examine their tickets.

Of course Marakanoff and Lodjeski were greatly annoyed at the disappearance of their servants—there seemed something mysterious about it. But questioning the train-guards brought out the fact that each of the valets had been seen with men who

seemed to be old friends, on the station platforms—so the only reasonable supposition was that they must have accompanied these friends to some near-by vodka-shop for a drink and failed to notice when the train was leaving. This was possible enough,—implied nothing in the way of a plot against the envoys,—and so they were quite well satisfied to let it go at that. If there was no word from the servants by the time they reached Vladivostok, it wouldn't be a difficult matter to obtain two other men who could be vouched for by the Soviet officials there. And as it might reflect somewhat upon their foresight in looking out for contingencies, they didn't send back any word to Moscow of their valets' disappearance.

At Omsk there was a wait of several hours. Their three English acquaintances were on the platform as the train came in, according to the promise made in Moscow —the five going off to the best restaurant in the city for as good a dinner as it could provide. Afterward the Englishmen, having completed their investigations in that vicinity, got on the train to accompany them as far as Irkutsk, where the whole train was broken up and reassembled for the run to Vladivostok—a matter of nearly a day. During the run the Englishmen spent a good deal of their time in the envoys' compartment, describing what they had ascertained in their investigations—what their syndicate would probably do—and then discussing general economic questions throughout Asia, including a good deal of detail concerning the Japanese cities and people which the Russians carefully wrote down in memoranda for future reference.

IT was just getting dark when the train reached Irkutsk. Leaving one of the Soviet officials in charge of their compartment so as to be sure that nothing would be interfered with, the five went to the house of a Russian who had been corresponding with the English syndicate and had invited its representatives to stay with him while in that vicinity. He seemed to be quite influential with the commissars, under the rose, for the dinner and wines he gave them were the best they'd had in some time. From his knowledge of who and what the envoys were, they concluded that he must be really one of the Soviet leaders in Siberia. With all the secrecy as to their movements, it had been necessary, of course, to secure the coöperation of railway officials along the Trans-Siberian and local commissars at all the stops along the line, merely as a matter of protection for the envoys in case of unforeseen complications. That is to say, no apparent notice was taken of them, more than of other passengers, as long as nothing happened—there was no evidence whatever that they were personages of importance. But in case of emergency the train-crew would have taken any orders and protected them at the risk of their lives—the local commissars also.

Now, the plans of the Englishmen that night hinged upon certain actions of the envoys which they had figured out in advance. If they returned to their coupé in the train-yards and spent the night there, —not taking the risk of leaving their luggage in anyone else's hands for longer than two or three hours,—it would be a simple enough matter to arrange for handling them. On the other hand, if they considered their belongings safe in the commissar's hands and spent the night in the best hotel in town, the getting hold of them would be a more difficult and dangerous job—perhaps too dangerous to risk. Which left only Tchita for what they had in mind. As it happened, however, the envoys' mental processes worked exactly as it had been supposed they would—and they left the Russian's house at the outskirts of the town in his battered car at midnight, when fear of the Cheka kept most people indoors.

WHEN the car had gone but a short distance, three men with handkerchiefs over their faces jumped upon the steps, covering the chauffeur and the two envoys with automatics. The car was turned about and driven to an isolated house in the suburbs, where the captives were taken to an upper room—each feeling a sharp pricking in one of his legs for an instant as he was passing along a dark hall, but thinking it nothing more than a pin which had worked its way down inside his clothing. They hadn't been in the room to which they were taken more than two minutes, however, before it seemed impossible to keep their eyes open. In another moment they were completely unconscious—and their captors removed the bandannas from their faces, revealing themselves as the three Englishmen and the Russian at whose house they had dined that evening.

Then the chauffeur came in—and might have been recognized by some of the train-passengers as the Englishman who had been in the same compartment with the valets during the earlier part of the trip.

After bolting the door, two of the party sat down by the bedside for a careful study of the envoys' features as they lay there unconscious. A physical instructor would have estimated their weight and build as almost identical with that of the men on the bed, though he would have also known that they were in much better condition. Presently they took from a suitcase a couple of beautifully made false beards upon a basis of flesh-colored silk which they secured to their faces with an adhesive preparation flexible enough to allow full play of the facial muscles. After this they injected tiny drops of an Oriental drug under the skin in certain spots—which soon caused just enough swelling to reproduce exactly the facial contours of the envoys—the swelling remaining for several days and being renewable at will.

Then the chauffeur trimmed their hair until it exactly duplicated that of the captives. In color it was a close match except for a few gray streaks in that of one Englishman—easily touched out with a little dye. An exchange of clothing, jewelry, et cetera followed, until the other three looked from the impersonators to the men on the bed in amazement. The resemblance was almost unbelievable as long as they kept their mouths shut—and when they spoke, imitating the accent and little unconscious mannerisms of the envoys, it was evident that they could pass anywhere without question. After the others had drawn a breath of relief at their success thus far, one of the masqueraders asked the darker man of the other three:

"Now—what are you going to do with *them,* Abdool? Your degrees in medicine and surgery, which we supposed merely a pastime, have demonstrated their value before this—but if you can do what you say you can with these birds, it will simply clinch the matter!"

THE man addressed as Abdool sat down by the bedside and examined the faces of the unconscious men very carefully—pinching and pulling the muscles into ridges and lumps. Calling for a razor and lather-brush which had been provided, he shaved both of them closely. Then, bathing the faces with an antiseptic solution, he produced a lancet and made small incisions in various places—several of the muscles slightly altering their position as he did so. Sterilizing the tiny cuts until the bleeding stopped, he put away his implements and got up with a smile to look at his handiwork.

"Their faces will be a trifle sore for a few days, but nature heals little cuts like that very quickly, and they'll be none the worse for the operation—perfectly able to go about and attend to their affairs as they always have. Only—nobody who knew them will ever recognize that pair as the same men again! I've almost severed the small ligaments at the ends of certain muscles—which has the effect of relaxing the normal pull upon them and letting down the contracting power in spots. You notice that the whole appearance of the faces has changed in little ways. The changes are slight—yet you'd swear they are not the same men we brought in here. Not one of the train-crew or commissars will recognize them! Examination of the photographs in their passports will prove conclusively that they are impostors. You can turn them loose outside the city by noon tomorrow, Daghilieff, and let them do what they please, as long as they don't suspect that you were mixed up in this. Don't let them see you. We'll leave enough money in their clothes so that they can go anywhere they like. And now—back to the train!"

When they reached the envoys' compartment, at the train-yards, the sleepy commissar who had been left in charge never suspected them for an instant. He said that nobody had been in any part of the coupé since they drove away for dinner. When asked if it would be possible to hold the train in Irkutsk until night,—as they expected telegrams from Moscow which might not arrive before then,—he assured them that there would be no difficulty at all in doing that, and sent one of the guards to rouse out the station-master in order that there should be no misunderstanding about it. When he left and the doors of the big compartment had been locked, Abdool wanted to know just why the train was to be delayed.

"Because it's safer to settle the question of identity right here and now—settle it so conclusively that we'll not be under suspicion further along the line. Of course, there may be a slip-up from some unfore-

seen contingency—but that risk we'll have to take. I expect those envoys to start something as soon as they're able to think and talk, in the morning. Neither of them will realize how different he looks in spite of his shaved face—they'll go straight to the commissar, demanding our arrest. He'll think they're crazy—be about to chuck them in prison; but their story will be pretty straight—they'll remind him of things that were said when they left him in charge of the compartment. He'll remember that he was pretty sleepy when we came back here, and begin to wonder if there's really anything in the story—then he'll bring them down here to confront us and we'll have a show-down. If we convince him—that settles it!"

AS the supposed Marakanoff had figured, matters came out exactly as he had outlined them. While he and the pseudo-Lodjeski were going through some of the papers they had found in the luggage—instructions, lists of names and the like—and their two companions were on the platform outside, cursing the delay, the commissar arrived with two angry and very much excited men, who were struck dumb when they entered the big compartment and saw their doubles calmly smoking at the table as they worked. One glance practically satisfied the commissar, but Lodjeski shrieked:

"The passports! The *passports!* Make them show you their passports! You'll see! There are pictures of us both with our beards and smooth shaved!"

The commissar turned to the envoys with a grin.

"It's ridiculous, comrades! But you see my position? I'm held accountable to investigate even such a cock-and-bull story as this! Would you object to letting me see your passports?"

"Of course not! Here they are! Examine them as carefully as you please. These men are crazy, of course—but there seems to be method in their insanity. Let us investigate it by all means!"

A single look at the identifying pictures inside made the commissar's lip curl with contempt. He held the photographs before them—then pointed to a mirror on the bulkhead. Marakanoff's eyes fairly bulged in horror as he made his own comparison—his own face in the mirror and that in the photographs simply didn't belong to the same man, and he knew it was useless to argue the matter. But he had more intelligence and resource than his double gave him credit for—nearly turning the tables in one short second. Whirling around, his arm shot out straight for his impersonator's false beard. Had his fingers obtained a firm grasp upon it, the game would have been up right there—but the supposed Lodjeski's fist caught him upon the point of the jaw, and he listened to angel voices for several minutes on the floor of the compartment. Had the man at the table made the slightest effort to dodge his attack,—shown by the quiver of a muscle that he anticipated or feared any touch upon his beard,—it might have aroused suspicion in the mind of the closely watching commissar. But the supposed Marakanoff actually allowed the frenzied man's fingers to touch the ends of the hairs without moving a muscle. When his assailant had been knocked senseless and Lodjeski was covered by a heavy-calibered automatic, the man at the table calmly lighted a fresh cigar and appeared to be considering the whole occurrence. Presently he said:

"Commissar, there's something rather serious behind all this. Our two valets, who left Moscow with us, disappeared very mysteriously on the way. We supposed that they met friends on the station platforms—went off to some near-by shop to have a drink—and missed the train. But no word of any sort has come from them. Now, we have these two apparently crazy men claiming that we are impostors—that *they* are the real envoys—demanding our arrest, and permission to proceed in our places. Suppose they had convinced you that they were telling the truth—and you arrested us—and let them proceed in our places? Do you see where that would put our secret mission? In the hands of unknown conspirators—using it for their own purposes—against the safety and foreign policy of Russia! This matter may be a good deal more serious than it first appeared! Have you searched these men thoroughly? Do so! Examine any papers they have—and every stitch of their clothing!"

JUST why the two had neglected to see what was in the pockets of the strange suits in which they found themselves can only be explained upon the supposition that they were too crazily intent upon securing the arrest of the impostors before

the train left, to think of anything else—which, of course, was natural enough. The inside pockets of their coats produced several letters from Berlin written to Wilhelm Kraft and the Herr Carl von Hohenburg in care of a German forwarding agent in Moscow—letters referring to some business enterprise which might, with a little imagination, be construed as applying to this matter of the envoys. Secured with safety-pins to inside waistcoat pockets were passports made out in the same names, but with the photographs missing. A few remaining fragments of the corners showed where they had been pasted in. The plain inference was that Marakanoff and his companion had removed the picture identification to give the impression that their own passports had been stolen from them and these substituted. The commissar drew this inference at once—and the proof of conspiracy was so conclusive against them that they would have been shot within an hour had not the masqueraders offered what seemed to the commissar a valuable suggestion:

"Of course, the obvious thing in a case like this is to shoot them as soon as possible—but if you do that, it removes all chance of tracing out where the plot started. These fellows may be merely tools of some political organization working against Russia. In that case, it would be foolish to shoot them and let the scoundrels in the background escape. The poor devils are probably actors—hard up, not earning enough to fill their bellies, jumping at a chance like this to make a stake. Anyhow—my suggestion is to keep the two for a year or more if necessary and see if you can get any connection between them and our valets' disappearance. Set the Cheka at work upon the case. Watch the letters or telegrams coming into Irkutsk. Meanwhile, I'll get word to you in case further evidence comes to our notice."

The real Lodjeski was nearly crazy—commenced shrieking abuse at the two masqueraders for what the commissar gathered was the prospect of imprisonment if not execution. But Marakanoff shut him up.

"It might have been worse, comrade! These Excellencies have but to say the word, and we'll be shot in some filthy cellar within an hour—we really owe our lives to them! Perhaps we four may come together again at some other time when we can repay a little of the debt—with interest. Until that time comes, we'd better keep our mouths shut."

As the commissar understood this, it was practically an admission of conspiracy against the envoys and acceptance of their defeat. In the circumstances it was natural enough that they should hint at future revenge if the chance ever came their way. He jotted down detailed memoranda of the affair in his official records so convincingly that when a subsequent inquiry came from Moscow, it settled all doubt as to the impossibility of any substitution having occurred.

WHEN the train was on its way again and the other two Englishmen had been invited into their compartment, there was some discussion as to their next move toward strengthening their position, and the supposed Marakanoff raised the problem of their beards:

"It's going to be a nuisance to remove them each day while we shave, and then replace them exactly right. Aside from that, a false beard is always a risk—one never knows when something will catch and rip it loose. With the passport photographs to copy, we can make up with smooth faces to correspond with them as well as with all this foliage. My suggestion would be to let two of the train-guards hear us discussing the matter of shaving, when they come in to examine the tickets next time—we can be arguing the question for one reason or another. Then, when they see us shaved next morning, they will recall the conversation and comment upon it among themselves, while the next examination of our passports by the commissar at Tchita will thoroughly establish the identification. After that, it's a very simple matter to let our own beards grow and give them the exact appearance of those in the photographs."

This decision was carried out with entire success—two of the train-guards being so interested in the discussion that they repeated it to the rest of the crew with the warning to look out for the changed appearance of the envoys in the morning. As they were all expecting it and visualizing their distinguished passengers as smooth-shaved, there was no difficulty in recognizing them. Meanwhile the supposed Marakanoff had carefully typewritten full reports of the attempted substitution and sent them back to the proper officials in Moscow, it being a simple mat-

ter to forge the signature, with a little practice, from that on his passport. Documents found in the luggage, of course, gave them practically all the inside information they needed in referring to various details of their mission and knowing whom they were supposed to communicate with. They even sent back telegrams in a private code which they found sewed inside the lining of Marakanoff's coat. At Tchita their faces—even with a few days' growth of beard—were so unmistakably those pictured in the passports that the local commissar never had the slightest doubt of them.

When the train reached Vladivostok, they were met by two men from Downing Street who had been cabled to disguise themselves as Russians and apply—with recommendations which they had little trouble in obtaining—for the positions of valets to replace those who had so mysteriously disappeared. These men had received no instructions whatever from the Foreign Office, which knew absolutely nothing of their action until long afterward. The cables had been signed with a name which they knew was frequently used by Earl Lammerford of St. Ives—formerly Dean of the King's Messengers—and when de-coded, it read:

> If you feel like a bit of hair-raising adventure with humorous side to it, make up as Russian valets to replace two missing ones. Await arrival of secret envoys Marakanoff and Lodjeski—Vladivostok. Should reach there in about a month. See commissar. Say telegraphed for to supply vacancies. Cook up fake cablegram. He will know when envoys expected. Meet train. Ask for men by name—not title.
>
> FRANCIS LANGDON.

As Twombly and Akeley had been marking time at the Pekin embassy with leave due them any day they cared to apply for it, they jumped at the opportunity for "seeing life," as they expressed it—there being a fixed belief in the Service that anything in which Earl Lammerford and his friends were mixed up promised more risk, adventure and opportunity for brilliant, nervy action than anything else likely to come their way. Thus, the secret mission from Moscow reached Tokio—duly accredited and very satisfactorily welcomed—in the persons of four clever Englishmen instead of Russians—another two Englishmen arriving at the same time with no apparent connection.

THERE were official "conversations" almost every day for a month—with cipher radiograms and letters going back to Moscow quite frequently, and as many reaching the envoys from there. Contrary to the anticipations of the Soviet officials, neither Marakanoff nor Lodjeski appeared to be getting as favorable an impression of the Nipponese attitude as they had been led to expect.

By way of Aomori and the Tsugaru Strait, it is a short trip to Vladivostok—and occasional letters found their way back which appeared to have been mailed by one of the valets in Vladivostok to insure against the possibility of their being read by any of the Japanese. In these letters the doubts were more freely expressed. According to Marakanoff, the Japanese were favorably inclined to the alliance on the surface, but with very decided reservations underneath. In fact, he claimed to have noticed upon several occasions evidences of strong feeling against him and Lodjeski among the people in the street,—even among some of the statesmen,—and expressed some apprehension of assassination at the hands of irresponsible radicals.

All this covers in a general way their activities for over two months—the supposed envoys demanding in most instances the extreme which they were authorized to ask on behalf of the Soviet rather than adopting the more conciliatory attitude which they were supposed to follow. They gave the impression of cocksureness at Moscow—the attitude of a power holding all the strong cards and able to force the play at any moment—the impression of already having so much control in China, thanks to the Koffe propaganda, that they *could* freeze Japan into isolation if they cared to, or if they were antagonized too far by hesitation upon her part. All this, of course, was very far from the Muscovite intention. It had been authorized, in case the envoys decided their only chance was a display of firmness, but none of the Soviet officials believed it would be even advisable. And the immediate effect upon the Japanese statesmen was naturally antagonizing—supposing, as they did, that they were in much the stronger position. The Nipponese were disappointed. An alliance which had promised much advantage to them now appeared to have so many strings to it that a good deal of further consideration seemed advisable. So they temporized.

It must be admitted that the envoys played the game as unmistakable Russians. While socially pleasant and courteous, they bullied diplomatically—betrayed the Tartar in them at every step. It was really one of the most finished bits of impersonation diplomacy has ever seen—if diplomatic circles could have known the truth and admired the brilliant finesse.

EVENTUALLY there came a time when the pseudo-envoys knew that they must extricate themselves from the situation if they were to get out of it alive. Upon several occasions they had known that they were under constant espionage from the Japanese secret service—with the excuse that the Government was responsible for their safety. So Marakanoff's first move was to exchange visits with his two English acquaintances who were staying at the Grand Hotel on the Bund at Yokohama—he and Lodjeski having a suite at the Imperial in the Uchi-Yamashita-cho, Tokio. On the day when the famous yacht *Ranee Sylvia*—belonging to Trevor—dropped anchor inside the Yokohama jetties, the envoys took an electric train down, called for the two Englishmen, and went with them to Kamakura to see the great bronze Buddha, giving the valets a holiday which they spent in visiting friends on one of the steamers at Yokohama. The party returned from Kamakura in time for a late dinner at the Grand Hotel—afterward going up to their friends' private suite for a smoke.

Half an hour later a couple of Englishmen in tweeds came out of that suite at a moment when the floor-page and house-detective happened to have their attention temporarily fixed upon the door of another room, and went down to the lobby—whence they strolled out along the Bund to the steamer-*hatoba* and got into a yacht-launch. They were seen, of course, by the secret service men—but there was no reason for shadowing them. The hotel-clerks thought they recognized their faces as guests at some time or other, though not stopping there at the time. Somewhat later they saw the two Englishmen come down and leave the hotel—but without their Russian friends—which left the secret service men up in the air. They couldn't ask the Englishmen what had become of them—would have learned nothing if they had. So they watched the hotel all night without getting a trace of the envoys.

Meanwhile the valets had called a boatman and had themselves rowed from the passenger-steamer to the big white yacht, shortly after dark—the two Englishmen in tweeds had reached her in the launch—and the others from the Grand Hotel came aboard later. In the morning a party from the yacht consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Trevor, Earl Lammerford of St. Ives, Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan, the Honorable Raymond Carter, of Washington, the Honorable Martin Twombly and Sir Frederick Akeley, of Downing Street, came ashore to call upon two of the Japanese princes. After remaining at Yokohama for another day, during which her cruising-party was seen at the houses of prominent Japanese in Tokio—the yacht left for Hongkong. At dinner, the first night out, some one proposed a toast to "the Russian secret envoys—and their suite"—after which the question was asked whether their luggage and papers had been left at the Imperial Hotel, or had been destroyed. And Earl Trevor answered it.

"That was the cream of the whole joke! All the luggage and papers were left, as they naturally would have been when those envoys so mysteriously disappeared. Everything will be overhauled by the Japanese secret service—naturally. And instructions from Moscow will be found, indicating an amount of international duplicity which will make Japanese statesmen very cautious in all their future dealings with the Russians—which is a result not altogether displeasing to *us*. Meanwhile—I've a letter in my pocket which Sir Frederick will take up to Vladivostok and mail to Moscow. Among other things, it says:

" 'We are becoming increasingly positive that our assassination has been decided upon—possibly in a way to give the impression of accidental death—possibly disappearance which never will be explained. All preparations have been made for our escape, with the assistance of friends we think are trustworthy. They will get us aboard one of the foreign steamers just before sailing time. Will cable after we escape—unless we are betrayed.'

"Now, when Marakanoff and Lodjeski never do turn up again, what's the answer? Eh? Rather interesting game, I call it—and—er—not without some risk, all things considered. What?"

Another fine story of the Free Lances in Diplomacy in our next issue.

The Home Immigrant

The talented author of "The Speed Cure," "Poetic Injustice" and other memorable contributions here offers the strange story of an American who found himself a foreigner in a great city.

By GEORGE L. KNAPP

CALVIN WEBB was an immigrant. His name and blood were Anglo-Saxon. His ancestors had lived in America since the middle of the seventeenth century. But so far as Chicago was concerned, he was a being from another world, more lonely than the rawest recruit from eastern Europe. Somewhere in the swarming city hive, that recruit could find a colony of his own kind of people; and Cal could not.

He was a Southern mountain boy, born in one of the hill counties of Kentucky, and had come north at the age of seventeen to make his fortune, carrying the blessings of both parents, and the secret hopes of one. His father was something over two yards of bone and muscle, with a shrewd head at the top, who never learned to read till taught by the girl whom he had swept off her feet in a stormy courtship, and married before she had time to catch her breath. Cal's mother was a school-teacher from the Middle West, in the South on what she believed to be missionary work. She was happy in her marriage—prosperous too, in a moderate way; but in her heart of hearts she never ceased to feel like a duchess who has married a dragoon, nor to hope that one of her sons would make his mark in the world and the caste which she had left behind. When Cal, baby of the family, turned his face northward, his mother felt that her prayers were being answered at last.

He did not look much like a baby as he stood on North Clark Street one late summer morning shortly after his arrival in the city. Already full six feet high, with the serious face of the mountaineer and blue eyes looking in forthright fashion from under heavy brows, he seemed at least three years above his actual age. Those brows just now were drawn together in a frown, and with good reason. On his way back from an unsuccessful trip in search of a job, some one had picked his pocket, and though he had a little hoard sewed into his clothes, the loss was serious.

"Must have been that fat scalawag on the car where I changed at Halsted," he mused. "If I'd pasted him when he was

shovin' me, 'twouldn't of happened. Maw's always tellin' me to keep my temper, but I reckon there's times when it pays better to let go of it for a spell. I'd plumb like to meet that chap again. I bet I'd get more'n ten dollars' worth out'n his hide!"

FOR a moment he was minded to take the back track in pursuit of vengeance; but this impulse was too vain to last. Probably he wouldn't know the fellow if they met; there were so many people in this town that you simply couldn't keep track of them. He had seventy-five cents in silver left, enough to carry him through the day without resorting to his secret hoard. Better eat, and continue job-hunting. There was a restaurant near by which looked cheap—comparatively speaking, for Cal did not believe there was any real cheapness in the city. He turned in, mounted a stool at the counter and gave his order:

"Ham sandwich, please."

The waiter nodded superciliously, disappeared, and in a moment came back with the sandwich. Clearly it had been put up in advance—and looked it. The stale bread was soaked with grease, the thin shaving of fourth rate ham entirely hidden. Cal inspected it, raised it to his nose, sniffed the rancid butter that gave a final touch of uneatableness and pushed the thing away.

"That aint a ham sandwich, Mister," he said. "I come from a place where they raise ham. That aint nothin' but some boiled hawg that's got lost in the box of hardtack. Jest bring me a real sandwich, please."

The waiter stared, then gestured with his head to the proprietor, who had heard the remark, and came bustling.

"Vot's de matter?" he demanded. Cal repeated his objections to the proffered food. The proprietor scowled.

"Dot sandvige is good," he averred.

"All right," said Cal. "You keep it, an' bring me another."

"You pay for dis von," said the restaurant-keeper.

"Mister, I aint goin' to pay you for somethin' I can't eat," returned Cal. "You bring me a decent sandwich, an' I'll pay for it."

"You pay for dis," exclaimed the victualer, "or I'll—"

He stopped suddenly as Cal uncoiled his legs from the stool, and straightened his six feet of length with a movement like that of a sleepy panther.

"Yes, Mister?" said Cal. "Go on—I'm listenin'. I didn't jest hear what you-all was goin' to do to me. What was it, Mister? I'd plumb like to know."

The restaurant man did not answer. He had already signaled one of his underlings that this was a case calling for legal reinforcements. Cal waited a full minute for a reply, got none, and walked to the door in time to meet a policeman.

BY the end of Cal's free ride to the jail, he wished he had taken the officer's advice and submitted to the petty extortion. It was too late now, however. After a brief wait he was booked; after another short delay he was searched for concealed weapons and given a cursory inspection which pronounced him free of contagious disease. These formalities consumed the time when he should have been getting his jail dinner, but he forgot it in the excitement, and naturally the officers did not think of it. Then a guard led him a devious course along corridors, up stairs and through doors which other guards were summoned to unlock, and placed him at last in a cell. Three other persons occupied it already; a pensive-looking Italian who was whistling softly an air which Cal liked though he never had heard it before, a thick-set man of unknown nationality lounging half dressed on a bunk, and one whose back was turned at the moment.

Cal looked carefully at the cell. It was ten feet long, seven and a half feet high, and five feet wide. At one side was a tier of three bunks, one above the other, with bedding that showed signs of long and promiscuous usage; in the open space left were the sanitary arrangements and drinking fountain. Presently Cal became aware that some one was speaking to him, and turned. Beside the Italian stood a man not more than five feet high, slenderly built, with well-shaped features and restless, birdlike yellowish eyes.

"Set down, myte," the little man was saying. "'Ere!" He showed the way by squatting on the edge of the lowest bunk. "Might as well tyke it easy. I'm Shorty —wot's yer nyme?"

"What do—oh," said Cal, as understanding came to him in the midst of his question. Like most American country boys, he never had heard the cockney dialect that turns *"a"* into long *"i."* "My

name's Cal," he returned, folding up his long frame beside his companion.

"Got the mykin's of a fag?" asked the little man. This had to be translated. Cal explained that he did not smoke. Shorty sighed, but his friendliness was unchecked.

"Wot's yer grift?" he asked next.

"What is my which?" asked Cal. The Italian laughed, but the thick-set man swore.

"Aw, can the clack," he commanded. "The damn' boob don't know nothin'." Cal started to rise, but Shorty caught his arm.

"Don't start nothin'," he whispered. "The bulls 'll give yer 'ell." Aloud he added:

"Yer a Yank, aint yer? Wot part o' the bleedin' country do yer come from?"

Cal told him, and Shorty nodded understandingly.

"I been to Kentucky, to the ryces," he said. "Yer a long w'ys from 'ome, myte, but that don't 'urt, as long's yer don't get down'earted. Wot did they nip yer for?"

Cal answered, and Shorty in return explained the absurd notion of the police that he was a "moll-buzzer." Cal did not know that a moll-buzzer is a thief who specializes in robbing women; still less did he suspect that there might be a basis for the charge. It was unfair in one respect; Shorty was not a specialist at any one underworld craft. By turns he was capper, tipster, barker; when these occupations failed, he begged a little, stole a little, had even been known to work a little. He was a lively liar and an incurable coward, but instead of a coward's cruelty, he had a genuine kindliness, and he could see that Cal needed some kindly ministrations.

"Time for exercise, myte," he said suddenly as they heard a sound of doors being opened. " 'Ere's w'ere we tykes a stroll in the bleedin' bull-pen. I'll show yer the ropes. 'Taint so bad, w'en yer get used to it."

"I don't want to get used to it," said Cal.

"Carn't allers 'ave wot yer wants in this world," returned Shorty cheerfully.

The bull-pen was the usual sort—just a cage forty feet long by twenty feet wide enclosed by a double barrier, two steel networks, one outside the other, and placed six or eight inches apart. In this cage were more than forty persons, of all sorts and conditions known to the underworld and its borders, from the professional crook of the most dangerous sort to the too-importunate beggar and the unlucky Italian brothers nominally charged with disorderly conduct, but really held as witnesses in a shooting scrape. For two hours in the forenoon and two in the afternoon the men were turned together into the bull-pen; the rest of the time they spent in their cells. Most of them improved the chance to walk about, visiting; some squatted on their heels and talked with each other in low tones; a few stood by the grating and talked with friends from the outside.

"That double gryte is to keep 'em from passin' things through," explained Shorty after the manner of a showman. "But gor blime me, they does it all the syme! I've seen 'em, but I aint tellin'. 'Taint 'ealthy to talk too bloomin' free. It's them furriners yer wants to look out for. That fat bloke that's in with us, Roth, his nyme is—look at 'im over there. Up to some dirt, I'll bet, but for Gord's syke, don't start no row with 'im. 'E's got a pull, 'e 'as, an' the bulls 'll fair croak yer."

THE warning came none too soon. Roth had been talking to a couple of chaps who looked as thorough-paced crooks as himself, and now they rose from where they were squatting and approached Cal and Shorty.

"Here's the white-headed boy that never got pinched before," said Roth in an ugly sneer. He ran his fingers through Cal's hair, and then tweaked his ear. Shorty clutched the mountain boy's arm with a strangled "Don't!" The other two scoundrels had ranged up between the little group and the nearest guard in the corridor outside, to keep him from seeing the performance. Shorty saw the trick and checkmated it.

"Hi, there, orf'cer!" he called to a guard a little farther away. "My barrister-aint sent in 'is visitin' card today. Aint got 'im locked up too, 'ave yer?"

"Got him down in the cells, Shorty," said the guard with a laugh. At the little cockney's call, Roth and the other two had started and moved away—as Shorty knew they would. He steered Cal quickly to a place at the edge of the cage, and squatted down, wiping his forehead.

"My eye, that was close!" he exclaimed. "The look that bloke give me! Listen, myte: no matter wot 'e does, don't try to poke 'im. It's all yer blarsted life's worth! Just tyke 'is little tricks, an' look

pleasant; the orf'cers wont let 'im cut up too rough if yer don't start nothin'."

Cal did not believe the warning, but was too hungry and friendless to put the matter to the test. Roth went to the grating, through which he talked to a small, whiskered man with peering, nearsighted eyes but an important bearing. The brief season of comparative liberty ended, they were sent back to their cells. Roth cursed Shorty for butting in; the cockney replied meekly, and warned Cal back when the latter wanted to interpose. Supper came, thrust through what Cal called the "cat-hole" in the bottom of the cell door—soup and bread. In addition the Italian got three bananas, sent by a friend, and Roth a number of things supplied by Levolsky, the whiskered visitor. Roth showed his prizes and vaunted his pull, but kept them to himself. The Italian youth divided his fruit equally with Cal and Shorty.

"You needa mucha grub," said the giver. "Not enougha fat!" The words were as kind as the act, and Cal then and there revised his opinions of the Italians.

He slept that night on a mattress thrown on the floor. About seven in the morning came breakfast—in the well-worn jail joke, a choice between bread and coffee and coffee and bread, with no trimmings for either. At nine they went to the bull-pen, where Roth resumed his covert nagging. At eleven, back to the cells; and at noon came a real meal, beef stew and plenty of it. When Cal had absorbed his allowance, together with the last crumb of butterless bread that came with it, he felt like a new man. He beckoned Shorty to the back of the cell.

"What'll they do to me if I take a poke at that skunk?" he asked in a whisper, jerking his thumb toward Roth.

"My Gord, myte, don't try it!" returned Shorty in the same tone. "They'll put yer in the cells, nothin' to sleep on but a stone floor, an' nothin' to eat but bread an' water."

"Is that all?" said Cal.

"Aint it enough?" returned Shorty.

"Not half," said Cal. "Wait."

HE paid no attention to Roth's remarks until time came to take the afternoon stroll in the bull-pen. Then, instead of seeking a position near the grate and under the eye of a guard, he halted in the middle of the room. Shorty, badly scared but worse puzzled, stayed near. In a minute Roth came up, with a couple of toadies in tow, snarled out an obsence taunt, and jerked Cal's ear.

No boy grows up in a home like Cal's without some knowledge of how to use his fists. His left swing came with all the force of a powerful young body behind it, and caught Roth flush on the mouth. The bully's lip split and one tooth left its happy home at the shock, and he would have fallen but for the screen of spectators. He hit back blindly, missed, got a heavy wallop amidships; and then his neck was tucked into the crook of a steely left arm while an iron hard fist, rising in swinging jolts from below, began rearranging his features.

"Gor' blime me, 'e's got 'im!" squealed Shorty in an ecstasy of astounded pleasure; and then, remembering the situation, he cried:

"Quit, myte! Quit!"

Cal had no thought of quitting. Guards were bawling at him from the outside, and one was running to unlock the door. The prisoners enjoyed the fun too much to interfere. Cal hammered like a blacksmith till a stronger grip than his own fell upon his collar and he was yanked off his feet.

"What you tryin' to do, kill the guy?" demanded the guard.

"No sir," said Cal. "I could kill him easy enough if I'd wanted to, Mr. Officer. He's been picking on me ever since I come, an' I got tired of it."

Prisoners helped Roth from the floor. His lips, cheeks and nose were bleeding, the last-named feature was spread over half his face, one eye was half closed already, and from the other shot a gleam of surprise and terror. Shorty saw and read this sign of defeat, and gulping down his own fears, he spoke.

" 'E begun it, Orf'cer!" cried the cockney, pointing to Roth. " 'E pulled the kid's ear, an' 'taint the first time! 'E's been devilin' 'im all along, 'e 'as. It's Gord's truth I'm tellin'. Arsk the wop!"

The Italian youth confirmed Shorty's statement, and Roth was too dazed and cowed to contradict. He was taken to have his cuts touched with iodine, while Cal was led to the punishment cells. He went with a feeling of grim satisfaction which deepened later when he heard a scuffle of feet, a whimpering protest in Roth's voice, and then the clang of a door. Both combatants were being disciplined.

A full stomach after a period of short fare inclines one to sleep. Cal felt out

the boundaries of his cell, sat down in a corner and for a space, forgot his troubles. He was wakened by the sound of the bread and water being pushed through the "cat-hole;" he drank a little, ate a little less, and dozed off again. He slept most of the night, but even so the waking time seemed interminable. At eight the next morning—Cal would have sworn it was at least twelve hours later—he was let out, admonished about fighting, and taken back to his cell, where Shorty greeted him rapturously.

"Myte, it was beautiful," said the little cockney, and his voice dropped to a plaintive, mournful key as he added:

"If I only 'ad yer nerve!"

"Where are the others?" asked Cal, looking about him.

"Oh, the Italian, 'is time's up; an' Roth, 'e got a mouthpiece, an' they sprung 'im. Levolsky done it, I s'pose; that's the fuzzy face 'e was talkin' to."

"When are they goin' to let us out?" demanded Cal crossly.

"Gord knows; an' 'E aint tellin'," returned Shorty. "W'en they get bloomin' well ready, I s'pose."

"They're punishing us before they try us," insisted Cal.

"The w'y things goes with pore folks," answered Shorty. "Be glad 'taint no worse."

Cal could not see it that way. He had felt no bitterness at being arrested, none at going to the punishment cells. But to come back from the cells and find his persecutor released, while he had to wait day after day for the mere decency of a trial, galled him mightily. Mountain men are not accustomed to lie down under injustice; and as there was no individual to whom this unfairness could be charged, he began to lay up a grudge against society in general.

"That Levolsky bird—'im that come to see yer fat friend, 'e 'as it the pro—proleturiats is got to rise against the capitalists afore we ever gets a square deal," said Shorty one day. "Yer orter 'ear 'im, sometime. Reg'lar bullshevik, 'e is, but the cops aint wise. They thinks 'e's a fence, w'ich 'e is—an' a 'eap more. I don't 'old wi' them beggars, though. They just mykes things worse."

"Not much danger of making this worse," returned Cal, with the deadly certainty of offended youth.

"Wait till yer old as me," counseled Shorty.

TEN days after Cal's arrest, Shorty was released. The police had given up hope of convicting him. On the same day Cal was taken to the County Building for trial, but did not even get into the courtroom. Had they known his age, his hearing would have been pushed ahead; as it was, he had to wait his turn. After another night in jail, he was brought down again, this time into the courtroom, where he found Shorty waiting for him.

"Thort mybe ye'd like a friend around," said the kindly little scamp.

"It's—it's mighty good of you," said Cal, and stopped because his voice was husky.

It was afternoon before his case was called. Cal saw no sign of his accuser. The deputy prosecutor asked a question of the clerk, straightened up, and said something to the judge which Cal did not catch.

"Case dismissed," said the judge, nodding.

"What?" exclaimed Cal.

"Dismissed," repeated the judge, not unkindly. "No one to prosecute you." One of the court attendants added:

"You can go; you're free."

"But Mr. Judge!" exclaimed Cal. "If there aint anyone to prosecute me, what have I been kept in jail for? I've been locked up for two weeks, for nothing—"

"Next case!" called the judge, and Shorty pulled at Cal's sleeve.

"For Gord's syke, come along afore 'e chynges 'is mind!" exclaimed the little cockney in a whisper audible for at least ten yards. The unexpected shock upset the judge's gravity, but Cal took no comfort in the hearty laugh. Outside in the corridor, Shorty stopped, wiping the sweat from his brow.

"Gord strike me pink!" he exclaimed. "Ye're the bleedin' limit! Oh, Lord, if I 'ad yer nerve! Sarsin' the judge w'en 'e lets yer go—w'y, 'ow do, Mr. Levolsky. Lookin' after some o' yer friends?"

"How long you in the jug?" demanded Levolsky, ignoring Shorty.

"Most two weeks," said Cal. "An'—then—"

"You get off cheap," interrupted Levolsky. "The capitalists, your masters—they do not want to break you. They want to tame you. They want your strength, your bravery, to guard their gold. If you not tame, then they break you, like that." He brought his thumbnails together as if crushing an insect.

"But what right—" began Cal. Levolsky gave a snort, rather than a laugh, and interrupted again:

"Right! Right of being strong. That is the only right. All else is lies. You learn, if they not break you. You begin to see now. When you see more, come to me."

He turned away contemptuously and went back to the courtroom.

" 'E's a crab, that guy," said Shorty. "Come on."

HE led Cal to a restaurant. The boy had missed lunch while waiting for trial, and was hollow to his toes. Shorty, saying that he had collected some money that had been owing him for quite a spell, insisted on standing treat, and filled the lad with fairly wise counsel as well as food. The double ceremony finished, he walked with Cal to the latter's rooming-house. The landlady's daughter, Gertie, was on the steps as they approached. She nodded to Cal, gave Shorty an appraising stare that hastened his departure, and went inside. Cal followed, and Gertie spoke to him from the parlor:

"Hello, Cal."

"Evenin', Miss Gertie," he answered.

"Come here," she commanded. "How's the country kid?"

"All right," said Cal.

"All right, nothin'," she returned, giving her gum an extra crunch. "Where you been—in jail?"

"Wh-what?" asked Cal. "How—how did you know?"

"Guessed it," said Gertie, grinning impudently and flinging back her bobbed hair. "Hot dog, kid, don't look so 'shamed of it! It's nothing to get fussed about. How come? Nobody can hear."

Cal told. Gertie nodded darkly when he finished.

"Sweet business—I don't think!" she remarked.

"It aint fair," began Cal, but she broke in on him in disgust:

"Fair? Say, quit bein' a kid! There aint nothin' fair in a place like this. That grub-chaser's got a drag with the cops, gives 'em their chow for nothin', maybe, with a bottle of hooch on the side, now an' then. Say, when you get next to this town,—if you ever do,—lay for that bird till you catch him alone, an' push his face back till his nose rubs on his collar-button!"

Her language was coarse, her manner flippant; her rouge and lip-stick did their worst to spoil a face which nature had come close to making beautiful; but her sympathy was genuine and encouraging. Cal gave the first hearty laugh he had enjoyed for weeks.

"I reckon I'll do just about that, Miss Gertie," he said. "Now, where's your ma? I got to pay her for that room."

"I'll find her," said Gertie.

But Mrs. Nelson, when found, refused to take Cal's money. He hadn't used the room; why should he pay for it? If she had held it for him when anyone else wanted it, that would be different, but no one had wanted it. She explained this to Cal in quaint, broken English, for she was a Bohemian, and her name came from a Norwegian husband, now dead. Cal tried to argue the matter, but Gertie cut him short:

"Hot dog, Cal! If you've got some dough that's hurtin' you, take me to the movies. I'm sick to death of goin' with gabby girls."

Cal blushed and complied.

BY daylight next morning he was on the street looking for work with the want-ad section of a morning paper for guide; but the search was futile. He caught the first edition of one of the afternoon papers, glanced through the "Help Wanted" columns, hurried to some of the most promising places, but with no success. Jobs were scarce, and even when he saw other men land one, he failed. Chicago employers who were advertising for help wanted human oxen, and one look at this long-legged mountain mustang told them that their yokes would not fit.

Several times, in the days that followed, Mrs. Nelson met Cal and gave him a plate of those cookies with apple sauce in the middle, which are one of the finest samples of Bohemian cookery. He accepted them with grave thanks and made them serve for lunch, but he did not profit by them. It hurt Cal to be under obligations, and so he took Gertie to the movies. Mrs. Nelson understood his feelings and stopped her gifts. She was thinking of him one forenoon when he appeared at the door of her room, his old-fashioned telescope grip in hand.

"Mrs. Nelson," he said, "I'm goin' away. I ought to have gone before; I'm most a week behind now, but they prom-

ised me a job, one place, an' I waited too long for it. I'll leave this satchel with you till I can pay."

The good woman protested, but Cal was firm. He walked out of the house with less than a dollar in his pocket. He ate little that day, and slept at night in a twenty-five-cent hotel—not yet had he come to the flophouse. Another lodger there gave him a tip which proved good, for the next morning, out in one of the suburbs, he got some jobs doing housework and fixing lawns.

"There's a livin' in it, while warm weather lasts," said his acquaintance when Cal reported. "When winter comes, you got to hole up or go to jail. I'd sooner stem it, myself."

"Stem it—what's that?" asked Cal.

"Why, mooch, batter, panhandle, beg," returned the other. "Where in thunder was you raised?"

The boy's experiences were growing with his vocabulary. He found that most of the men at the Coxey Hotel lived by "stemming it." Some would work when they got a chance; others would not look at a job, though making a pretense of looking for one. They made more money begging than Cal could get for the odd jobs he managed to find. The older hands had a regular budget; so much for bed, so much for meals, the rest for contraband hooch. Cal was familiar with corn liquor from babyhood, but one taste of the stuff circulating at the Coxey made him a total abstainer for months.

"Ha, you learn something!" said Levolsky one day. "They make you go hungry, and you think, think. When you learn more, come to me. I give you a job, good job, not one for half-bakes."

FROM time to time the boy met Shorty, always by the latter's design. The little cockney had secured a minor post in a bootlegging gang, which gave him a better income than was usual for him. He would take Cal to supper and a movie, always picking pictures crammed with sloppy sentiment. At seventeen a country youth's appetite for that sort of thing is not large, and Cal wondered mightily at his companion's taste. Shorty must have told tales, and been at some pains to tell them, for twice Cal got a letter, signed by Mrs. Nelson but written by Gertie, asking him to Sunday dinner. He went once and was cheered by the little celebration; but his uneasy pride would not let him go a second time, especially since he could see that the Nelsons did not approve of Shorty.

Levolsky apparently decided that Cal's education was proceeding in the right direction, for he paid more attention to the lad. He gave Cal an occasional errand, and paid him well for attending to it. He could afford good payment; this apostle of a new social order was a dope-distributor as well as a fence, and the packages which Cal carried so innocently were heroin and cocaine. Having secured the boy's good will in this way, Levolsky preached bolshevism to him by the hour; and Cal, sore with a growing sense of injustice, was more affected than he knew. Nor was there any counterweight. Alone and absorbed in his search for work, Cal knew nothing of the clubs and settlement houses where men and women spend their lives trying to give youth the help and opportunity which the city, as a city, denies. In the fight for a young man's soul, fought in that wretched hotel and those dreary streets more surely than ever in the cell of medieval monk, the only forces on the side of right were a widowed lodging-house keeper, a flapper girl with every unlovely mannerism that rouses the wrath of purists and preachers, and a timid little crook from the slums of London. How the high gods must laugh at the wise saws and respectable rules of their puppets!

AT last Cal got a job mixing concrete for a small building that had hung fire for some time. He was to get a dollar an hour, and draw his pay each evening. He met Shorty after the first day's work, and the little man shook his head when told of the case.

"It's too good to be true," he said. "There's a gyme in it, somew'ere. I 'ave it! Bet that contractor's buckin' the unions!"

"What if he is?" asked Cal.

"Wot if 'e is? W'y, look out for a brick on yer conk, any time. The w'y they slug scabs in this town is somethin' fierce."

Cal worked three days more. He paid his arrears at Mrs. Nelson's. He cleared up some small loans which Shorty had made and forgotten, and bought a few clothes. Then one evening, as he passed an alley, he heard a rustle, felt a terrific shock—and woke up in the accident ward of the County Hospital, with a splitting headache and a pain in his side, where his

assailants had kicked him for good measure.

Shorty read of the assault, and came at once to see his protegé. Two days later he came again, the interne with him; and between them, they fairly swept the lad from the hospital. He was taken to Shorty's room, a humble lodging but tolerable, and bidden to "tyke it easy for a spell."

He took it as easy as the sons of Martha are permitted to take things, and his hardy young frame gathered strength. Shorty's bootlegging friends were lying low till a certain shooting-affray should be forgotten, and the little cockney was lifting leathers again. His working hours seemed peculiar,—a street-car conductor would have identified them as rush hours,—and he was with Cal a great deal, a fact which did not escape the attention of the officer on the beat. Perhaps Shorty felt this espionage and took steps to release Cal from it. The fourth time Cal went to the dispensary, he saw a familiar figure in the waiting-room as he came out.

"Why—why, Miss Gertie!" he exclaimed. "You aint hurt too, are you?"

"Nix," she answered, and for the first time since he had known her, she seemed embarrassed. "There's nothing wrong with me but my disposition. I—we heard you were pretty near croaked."

"I was bunged up a little," said Cal.

"You tell 'em, bandage, you've been rolled," remarked Gertie in the slang of the moment; then after a brief wait:

"Where you stopping?"

"Why, Shorty come an' got me. He's got a room over on Halsted Street. I'm staying with him."

"Why don't you come back with us?" said the girl in a rush. "I—Mother—we—you'd better come. There's a room vacant, an' mom likes to cook, so you wont have to go out for your meals."

"Why, Miss Gertie, that's powerful good of you an' your ma. I—I can't tell you how much I appreciate it. But I can't take an' do like that. You see—well, they cleaned my pockets when they had me down. Shorty's room don't cost any more for me bein' in it, but your ma, that's the way she makes a living. It wouldn't be right for me to do that."

"Oh, you'll pay it sometime," said the girl, flushing.

"Yes." Cal's face was sober under the bandage. "I'd pay it sometime, but I'm gettin' plumb uncertain when that time's comin'. This town's a harder row to hoe than I reckoned. It's mighty good of you an' your ma, Miss Gertie, but I reckon I can't take advantage of you thataway."

GERTIE had taken a couple of hours off at the store to meet Cal and bring him back. It was the first time, as she would have put it, that she ever chased after anything that wore pants; and to have the chase futile was more than her uncertain temper could stand.

"Oh, I know what's the matter with you," she said, sniffing scornfully. "You've got that old fool notion that you mustn't take help from a woman."

"I never said anything like that, Miss Gertie," said Cal gently.

"You don't need to say it," she snapped. "I can see it plain enough. You're a Southern gentleman, you are, one of the lords of creation, an' you've got to be independent of any such poor slob as a girl or a woman! Hot dog! I should think you'd go a little farther with it. If I was a man, I'd sooner borrow money from a girl that earned it honestly than from a pickpocket!"

She turned to go; but Cal, with two long strides, was ahead of her, his face as white as the bandage above it.

"I—I ask your pardon, Miss Gertie," he said. "You said something then that I didn't just plumb understand. Do you mean that—Shorty—steals things, picks pockets?"

"Ask him," returned the girl, sullen and a little frightened at her own outburst and the way Cal was taking it.

"I'm askin' you," said Cal. "Is—is he—a thief?"

"Course he is!" flared back the girl. "Anybody but a hick from the bush leagues would know it the first look at him. Oh, Cal, I didn't mean that," she cried, in quick repentance. "Don't get sore at my tantrums. Come on, where there's a place waiting for you, an' forget it!"

"I aint—sore," returned the lad after a pause. "It's true, what you said. I—I am a hick, I reckon, an' a pretty dumb one too. I'm sure obliged to you an' your ma about the room, but I can't take it. It was awful good of you to come clear out here to look me up. I'm comin' over to see you pretty soon."

"No—no!" she exclaimed, stamping her

foot. "I wont have you. I hate you! Go on with your pickpockets! I hate you!"

She turned and made off at a stumbling run, while Cal stared bewilderedly after her.

HE roused himself after a minute and walked slowly—for he was still weak—to the place where he had been employed; but the contractor had made peace with the unions, and Cal was told there was no job for a scab. Coming away, he met Levolsky in front of the latter's door.

"You run into it, eh?" said the anarchist with as near an approach to a smile as he could muster.

"Yes," said Cal shortly.

"When you learn it not pay to be tame dog for capitalists? They not protect you. They cannot. Their power, it is passing. The day of the people is near. Why you not take the people's side?"

"I don't like this bolshevism," said Cal uncertainly.

"You like the system that you hungry keeps?" demanded the crook. Cal could find no answer. Levolsky went on:

"With us, you climb high. You are brave. You are native son." He almost spat the words. "So the cops, they not suspect. But hurry, or you be too late."

"I'm in a hurry for a job, just now," said Cal.

"More tame dog," said Levolsky. "So, be my tame dog. Take message for me. I pay well."

Cal took the message, and the pay provided something to eat and a bed at the Coxey. When the lad had gone after collecting his money, Levolsky turned to a fat man with upturned black mustache who was lounging in the store.

"I want that fellow, for one job," he said.

"You will not get him," said the black-mustached man. "He is an Anglo-Saxon fool, who goes by maxims from the dark ages."

"I shall get him," said Levolsky with confidence. "If I can coax him, good; if not, I whisper a word, and the fool police drive him to me. They do not know me, those police. It is a perfect disguise, this place. They watch me for a fence, take the tips I send them, and never dream the truth. You shall see!" He spoke in German, the *lingua franca* of Marxian revolutionaries. The black-mustached man only shrugged in reply.

That night Shorty found a note in his room. He read it, and with quick intuition decided that Gertie was the one who had "put the kid wise."

"Aint women 'ell?" said Shorty with a groan. "The pore kid! 'Elpless as a byby, for all 'is size—an' I carn't do a thing!"

IT is needless to describe in detail the weeks that followed. Day by day, in every way, times were getting harder, and Cal's plight was growing worse and worse. Lawn work in the suburbs was over. The market gardens wanted him as little as did the city. He learned of the docks where the fruit-boats come in from Michigan, and slept there night after night, under a blanket of newspapers, on the off chance of getting a job in the morning. He distributed handbills, looked for the roughest roustabout jobs, and still could not get enough to eat.

"How much longer you be tame dog and damn fool?" demanded Levolsky.

"I don't know," said Cal. "A little while, I reckon." He walked away, saying to himself that it would be a very little while, and that he would rather do anything than beg. Levolsky summoned one of his hangers-on, and gave some careful instructions. The crook nodded and slipped away. Levolsky nodded too.

"A little while," he repeated, sneering. "If I know you, Mr. Cal, you come in a littler while than you think!"

A few blocks from the pawnshop Cal met Shorty.

"'Ello, myte!" cried the little rascal. "'Ow's the gyme?"

"All right," said Cal shortly.

"Good! I allers knowed yer'd myke it. soon's yer got onto the ropes." He had noticed the hunger in Cal's face, and it hurt him to the marrow. "I aint doin' so bad myself, now," he went on. "Not the old w'y," he explained. "I aint honest like you, myte, but I aint copped a leather for a long spell."

"I'm glad," said Cal. An alley in the next block held a wallet that Shorty had lifted from a passing merchant, and Shorty's pockets held the former contents of the wallet, but what Cal didn't know couldn't shock him.

"Come on an' 'ave a bite with me for old times' syke," said Shorty.

"I don't think—" began Cal, but the little man cut him short:

"Course not. Wot the 'ell is there to think abart? Come on!"

He steered Cal into a restaurant as he spoke, and the smell of warm food did the rest. With wisdom dear bought through privations, Shorty ordered soup, which was brought at once, and then chops which had to be cooked, thus filling Cal's stomach by degrees. The boy ate till he could hold no more.

"You're awful good to me," he said soberly, when the meal was over. "I—I hope I can make it up to you some day. I—I was bluffing. This is the first bite I've had today."

"Gord blime me!" cried Shorty. "Come on 'ome with me, kid."

"No," said Cal. "I'll try a while longer, and if I do break—"

"Any'ow, come to a show with me," said Shorty. "Give yer dinner a chance to settle."

IT was eight o'clock when they left the movie. Cal again refused to go home with Shorty, but did accept the loan of a dollar.

Meanwhile, Levolsky's messenger had performed his errand, and two plain-clothes men got a tip which they accepted at once.

"I know that guy," said Schwartz, the younger and more aggressive of the pair. "He's a bad nut."

"Where does he hang out?" asked Radke.

"At the Coxey, mostly. There he is now. Wait—he's turning up that side street."

They held back till Cal was in the middle of the lonesomest block in half a mile, then ranged up alongside, and Schwartz spoke:

"We want you, young feller. Your game's up."

"Game?" said Cal in surprise. "What game?"

"Don't come that old dodge," said Schwartz. "You're the guy that pulled that Paisley stick-up." He caught Cal by one arm while Radke made sure that the youth had no weapon.

"I never stuck anybody up!" exclaimed Cal.

"You're a—liar," said Schwartz.

South of Mason and Dixon's line that is still a fighting term, even without the embellishments which Schwartz gave it, and which I am compelled to suppress. Cal jerked away from Schwartz, but on the instant Radke pinioned him from behind, and Schwartz struck the helpless boy twice with all his force. "Easy!" exclaimed Radke, loosening his hold, but Schwartz was in his element. It took three knock downs to end the unfair battle.

"Get up, you—" commanded Schwartz. Cal did not obey—he could not. The two officers stooped, lifted him, and in spite of Radke's protests, Schwartz was about to renew the beating when the policeman on the beat came up on the run.

"What's the row here?" he panted.

"Just got one of the guys that pulled that Paisley stunt," said Schwartz. "Come across, now," he added to Cal. "Where's your pal?"

"Paisley stunt? You're crazy!" cried the uniformed policeman. "They pinched them birds in Milwaukee this afternoon, tryin' to hock the stuff, an' they've confessed!"

"We got a straight tip it was this guy," insisted Schwartz.

"Tip, hell!" returned Moran, the officer in uniform. "I got the tip I'm givin' ye at the station, when I come on. You better let the kid go!"

THEY let him go, with a stern warning not to squawk. He turned in his tracks without a word, and walked straight to Levolsky's.

"I'm ready," he said. "I don't want to hurt any women or kids, but I'll do anything else to get square with the fellows that did this." He pointed to his bleeding face.

Shorty searched unavailingly for Cal for three days until, guided by an uncomfortable hunch, he visited Levolsky's, and found the youth doing some trifling chores in the pawnshop. He replied in the briefest manner to questions, but loosened up at last to say:

"I've made the break, Shorty. I'm going to fight—not your way; I don't know enough; but there's other ways, and I'm aimin' to take 'em. You'd better not come here much."

"Gord blime me!" said Shorty, but he knew better than to argue the question. He went out, used the telephone, then caught a car and rode to a store in the loop. The floorwalker eyed him suspiciously; so, having satisfied himself that there was but one entrance to the place, he waited outside. Luck favored him, for

when Gertie came out, she was alone. She gave him a cold stare when he spoke to her, and told him to take himself off.

"All right," said Shorty. "If yer wants to see Cal 'anged by the neck till 'e's dead, dead, dead, all right."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the girl, whirling back.

"Thort that'd get yer," said Shorty, grinning. "Well, miss, Cal's in a 'eap of trouble; you got 'im into it, an' now I wants to know if yer gyme to 'elp get 'im out?"

"I got him into trouble? What do you mean?"

"Yer chysed 'im aw'y from me, didn't yer? Cause yer thort I lifted a leather, now an' then—not that I'm admittin' anythin'. Well, 'e like to starved, an' 'e wouldn't let me 'elp 'im, an' then the cops beat 'im up for somethin' 'e didn't do, an' 'e's gone with that Levolsky."

"What of it? How's that going to get him hanged?" demanded Gertie.

"'Ow? Plyne enough. Levolsky, 'e's bullshevik—goes in for bombs an' things. The cops don't know it yet, but it's so. 'E's got Cal under 'is thumb now, an' 'e'll put 'im into the 'ard plyces, an' let 'im get caught— Strike me blind for a fat-'ead!" he cried suddenly. "W'y didn't I think o' that afore? I'll bet four quid Levolsky frymed the 'ole thing!"

"Why don't you go to the police?" asked Gertie.

"Aint I just been tellin' yer it's the cops that beat 'im an' druv 'im to this? No, 'e's got to be coaxed aw'y. Mebbe you can do it; I carn't."

THE modern girl has faults, but she is not afraid to make up her own mind. Gertie walked another fifty feet, thinking, then suddenly faced about.

"Well, let's go," she said. "Where is he?"

They reached Levolsky's neighborhood at that hour, neither early nor late, when everyone pays the least possible attention to everyone else. Shorty pointed out the shop, and walked past it twice. "Levolsky's there," he reported, "but I don't see Cal. 'E must of gone out."

"Why must he?" she retorted. True to the instinct of her sex, having started to worry, she was doing a good job at it. "You wait here; I'm going in!"

"Don't!" exclaimed Shorty, but she answered contemptuously that she could take care of herself, and ran up the three steps. Levolsky was not in sight. She slipped inside. It was the usual establishment—counters partly covered with showcases on each side, aisle down the middle, partition across the rear, with a door through it back of the right-hand counter. There was a peephole in that partition which the girl did not know about, but the eye which should have been glued thereto was turned elsewhere. Gertie heard a tinkle of glasses, then voices, then caught a word in German. She had the Slav's gift of languages, and knew German as well as English or Bohemian. She tiptoed closer and listened.

"It cannot fail. The fool boy thinks he is to give the suitcase to a man who comes while he is in the post office, and gives a password which I have told him. He is to go first to the stamp-window, which is crowded at that hour, then to the registry place, but he will not get there. I have told him to wait forty minutes, but the clock will be set when we give it to him for ten minutes—and *pouf!* These bourgeois Yankees will get a lesson!"

It was Levolsky who spoke—Gertie guessed that. Another voice remarked:

"It is a grand plan. Will the fool do it?"

"He has promised, and being a bourgeois fool, he will keep his word."

IT took a good deal to shock Gertie, but she was fairly tingling at this cool plot of multiple murder. She must find Cal. She started to back away, but was caught from behind in a muscular grip, and her scream was choked off in her throat.

Shorty, idling a few doors away, saw a man with a black mustache enter the pawnshop. He did not like it, but supposing Gertie to be buying or pretending to buy something, he felt little alarm. Then came a scream, cut off almost as it started, but unmistakable to one of experience in the underworld. With a tremendous effort to overcome his cowardice, Shorty ran to the shop, then forced his dragging feet up the steps. No one was in sight. Eyes fairly starting with horror, he regained the sidewalk and looked around. There was a restaurant at the other end of the block. Perhaps Cal was there. He ran as fast as his short legs would carry him, and met the tall youth at the door.

"Come, for Gord's syke!" he gasped. "It's Gertie! She went into that bullshevik's plyce to talk to you, an' they've

slugged 'er, or somethin'! I 'eard 'er 'oller, an' w'en I run to the door, she was gone!"

Cal raced to the shop. The door was locked. Whipping off his cap, he wrapped it round his fist and smashed the glass, reached through, and drew the bolt. "Come!" he called to Shorty, and darted inside as Levolsky appeared from behind the partition.

"What you want?" demanded the plotter.

"I want that girl," said Cal. "Where is she?"

"Girl? You're crazy! There is no girl here!"

"You're lying," said Cal. He leaped over the counter and stuck his foot in the partition door as Levolsky tried to shut it. Six men were in the back room, three of them standing close together at the left. "She's here somewheres," repeated Cal. "You'd better hand her over before I wreck the place."

"There is no girl here," said Levolsky, stepping squarely in front of Cal and speaking with dignity. "You disturb us. Go away." And then, "just like a bleedin' movie," as Shorty put it, one of the three men at the left moved a little—and there behind them was Gertie, tied in a chair with a gag in her mouth!

It was an hour before Levolsky knew what hit him, and then only by hearsay. Cal's upper cut started from his knee and gathered force all the way till it stopped under the scoundrel's chin. Yelling to Shorty to free the girl, Cal charged, knocked another fellow cold, caught the arm of the black-mustached man as the latter tried to draw a pistol—and the fight turned into a hand to hand grapple where numbers were bound to tell. Shorty tore off the girl's bonds, started to retreat, then, weeping with terror but unable to leave his friend, turned back in time to see Gertie bring a bottle down on the head of one combatant. He crumpled, dropping a pistol as he did so, and Shorty dived in and grasped it.

" 'Ands up!" he called. And there was that in his tone which secured obedience. Cal backed out of the ruck, panting. " 'Ere, you tyke this," said Shorty, handing over the weapon. "Keep 'em close w'ile I get the cops. There'll be rewards on some o' that bunch."

THERE were rewards on three of the bunch, which, when split three ways, enabled Cal to go back to the South, not wholly the loser for his city venture. Gertie and Shorty were at the train to see him off. He promised to come back, but when the train pulled out, Shorty turned to the girl with a shake of the head.

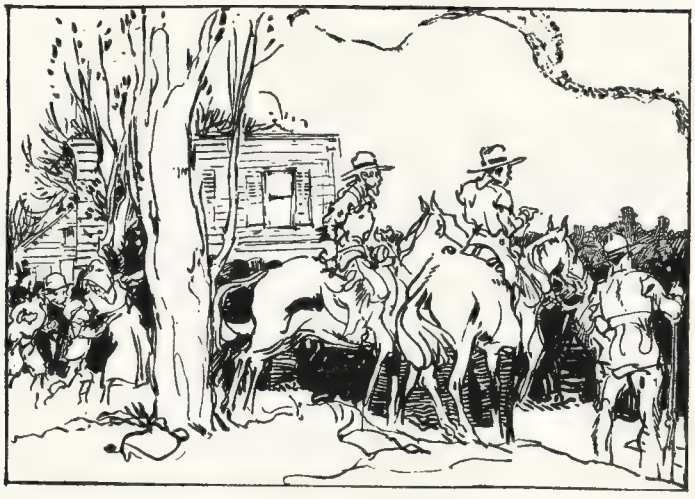
"Don't let 'im come back," he said. "Gord knows I 'ate to miss 'im, but 'e's abart as fit for a big town as I'm fit for a cow-'ouse. Don't let 'im come back."

"How can I help it?" returned Gertie, blushing a little.

"Go to 'im w'en 'e sends for yer, w'ich 'e'll do the minute 'e's of age, or m'ybe before," said Shorty. " 'E's a gryte kid, and ye're another—I can see yer soakin' that bloke yet. I'll 'ave to get a respectable grift afore the time comes, so yer can bring the kids to visit me. Well, so long."

"PAPUA will get you," writes the author of that brilliant novel of romantic adventure "The Sands of Oro." So too we confidently predict that this unusual, highly colored and eventful story of Papua will "get you." For its author, Beatrice Grimshaw, writes with masculine power and feminine grace, and her long residence in New Guinea gives her intimate knowledge and authority.

"The Sands of Oro"—along with "The Blackmailers," a striking novelette by Lemuel L. De Bra, and many specially interesting contributions by such writers as Courtney Ryley Cooper, Clarence Herbert New, Culpeper Zandtt, Warren H. Miller, Agatha Christie, H. Bedford-Jones and the like—will appear in the next, the November, issue of *The Blue Book Magazine.*



The Last

By

COURTNEY RYLEY COOPER

(What Has Already Happened:)

WILD BILL HICKOK rode into Salina, Kansas, with heavy news. The wagon-train which the scout and a few soldiers had accompanied as guard had been set upon by the Indians and only a few had escaped.

To young Tom Kirby, waiting anxiously at Salina for the arrival of his boyhood sweetheart Beth Halliday, the news was a shock indeed, for it had been his glowing accounts of the West that had influenced Beth's father to sell his possessions near St. Louis, invest in cattle and drive them to the virgin pastures of the West. And as Kirby rode with Buffalo Bill Cody and the other men of Salina to a belated succor of the ill-fated expedition, he learned that though Beth herself had escaped with a slight arrow-wound, her father and mother were dead, their cattle slaughtered or stolen.

It was perhaps not surprising that the stricken girl should blame Kirby for the disaster that had befallen her, and that the crude frontier town of Salina should seem to her a hateful place. The housekeeper of a pious fraud named Lige Morris gave her shelter; and Kirby, without her knowledge, sold the land upon which he had hoped to settle with Beth as his wife, and gave the money to Morris for her care and support.

But poor Beth would have none of Kirby now, and made a slow and listless recovery, enlivened by the courtship of a certain Captain Maitland, an army officer who seemed hand-in-glove with her host Morris—a real-estate shark masquerading as preacher.

Meanwhile all Salina looked forward eagerly to the coming of the railroad, which under soldier guard was being pushed vigorously toward the Kansas town from Fort Riley. And Tom Kirby, (after saying good-by to his friend Will Cody, who had taken a contract to supply the railroad workmen with buffalo-meat,) joined Wild Bill Hickok, at the behest of General Custer, in a mission of conciliation to the chiefs of the rebellious Indians. It would, they knew, be a difficult task, for the white man was pushing the Indian out of his hunting ground, and had broken many of his promises. *(The story continues in detail:)*

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Frontier

A stirring narrative of the building of the first railroad across the plains, by a man who knew Buffalo Bill and others of the famous characters well—the author of "The Wildcatters," "Memories of Buffalo Bill," "The White Desert" and other noted works.

CHAPTER IX

The Railroad!

A TALL man stood by a bonfire, new buckskins fitting with a perfection which only careful modeling could produce, his long Spencer rifle—recently raised to the dignity of a name, "Lucretia Borgia,"—swung jauntily before him, his big hat tilted upon his black-haired head. All about him lounged the bearded, grimy workmen of the day shift, waiting for the call from the cook tent a hundred yards away, where buffalo steaks were sizzling in the big pans, potatoes boiling in the steamers, and sour bread stacked high in waiting for the assault to come. And while they waited, they sang to the man who had made the major portion of their meal possible, sang with a tune they had garbled from some year-old popular air, fitting it with the words which a camp-cook that day had evolved:

"O-o-o-o-h, Buffaler Bill! Buffaler Bill!
Never missed, an' never will!
Allus aims an' shoots ter kill
An' he allus pays his buffaler bill!"

Little did the camp cook dream that he was giving a name to all the world, to kings and queens and presidents, and best of all to boyhood and girlhood for all days to come!

The tall man with the big hat and the long-flowing coal-black hair cocked his head with satisfaction, and blinked his clear, almost eaglelike eyes.

"Gol, boys!" he announced. "That was sure harmonious! Don't mind sayin' it even if it is about me. Think I could stand it ag'in, with me joinin' in the chorus. Now, all together!"

Once more the hand waved in token of leadership. Once more the voices bawled out into the cold, clear night—suddenly to cease at welcome news from the distance:

"Grub-pile riddy! Grub-pile riddy!"

In another instant Mr. William Frederick Cody, now and for all time Buffalo Bill, stood alone by the fire, still waving a hand —and singing. It was a good song, a man's song, and he liked it—even if it was about himself!

AFAR off down a crooked line of steel other bonfires gleamed, where the old flare-stacked locomotive steamed and

fussed, and where the night shift of workers was making the most of twelve hours of grueling labor. For these were the months of winter, when the lodges of the Indian remained near the clumps of cottonwood, where ponies might tear at the bark and where the bare branches might shield the tepees from the heavy snowfalls. These were the months of winter, and of labor—lonely months in which neither Sundays nor holidays played their part, in which every effort must be exerted that the great lane of steel be stretched slowly onward toward that invisible goal miles and years away—the foot of the snow-tipped Rockies.

Here, with the night crew there was singing also, and Cody again cocked his head as he reached the workers—halted, leaned on his rifle and listened. It was the new refrain—interesting indeed in a place where even a month-old newspaper was a novelty—and it helped to while away the hours. For a second time the song roared into progress, then bellowed to a conclusion. Cody shifted on his rifle.

"That's plumb good, boys!" he announced. "Can't say but that it's plumb good. What say you do 'er again." Then he turned at a sound beside him, and with a theatrical show of surprise, leaned far back, his rifle extended before him. "Well, where'd you come from, Kirby?"

"Riley."

"Where's Wild Bill?"

Tom Kirby smiled.

"Where do you suppose? Sitting in there with his hands, his feet and his tongue all tangled at the same time, trying to make love."

"Don't mean it! That Jordan girl? She's only got eighteen beaux besides him. But then, that aint nothin'. Had twenty-five last winter. You comin' out here to work?"

Kirby smiled.

"If you'll let me. Mr. Goddard said you needed a helper."

"Gol! I do. Keeps me so busy killin' buffaler to feed this outfit, I don't even have time to wipe my gun. That's what the boys are singin' about. Kind o' like it myself—taint a bad little song." Then suddenly he halted—Tom Kirby's eyes had noticed quite innocently that new suit of buckskin, and the joys of the day for one Mr. William Frederick Cody vanished. "Gol, Tom," came in a low voice, "I wisht you wouldn't look like that!"

"Like what?"

"Like that—at this here new suit. I just couldn't help it, honest. Knowed I oughtn't to've done it, me owin' you that four hundred, an' all. But I jest couldn't help it—I've sort o' got to maintain my position. But then—it'll be all right. Wait till you see what I'm a-fixin'. It'll pay you back a hundred times over. Aint sayin' a word now, till springtime comes." Then, with a quick effort to change the subject: "So you're goin' to be with me? Huh? Shootin' buffaler? Well, I need you. Through scoutin', huh?"

"Yes, unless Custer should send for me again. But it isn't likely. Think he's going on some kind of an expedition; I'm not sure. He'll only take Billy Comstock and a few of his regulars with him, though. Just to try to have another powwow with the chiefs and keep them quiet this spring. Bill and I weren't very lucky."

"Custer wont be, either. But there aint no harm in tryin'. As for us—five o'clock in the mornin', Tom. They're hard findin' these days, buffaler."

AND while the stars still shone, Tom Kirby started forth upon a new task. It was more like an expedition than a hunt; the quest of buffalo must lead them far from the frontal lines of the railroad, for days, perhaps weeks at a time. So, with the buffalo wagon, its skinners and laborers and soldier guards trailing behind, the two scouts led off in the distance, seeking the valleys along the Smoky Hill, where perchance a few of the leaders of the spring herds might be making their reconnoitering trip of the year.

March was just ending, bringing with it days of vapid sunshine, spots of blackened ice in the deadened stream where the faint current struggled for a sight of the world beyond its bondage of the winter, trickling rivulets along the rises, making their own tiny channels as they began their intricate journey to a far-away sea; a few birds swept overhead; now and then a rabbit or antelope bounded away before the scouts as they rode away the miles of their tedious search.

Tom Kirby once had looked forward to this season. He had dreamed of two cabins on a wide stretch of ground, the testing of the earth each day for the departure of the deep frost, the cool nights about the little fireplace—a soft brown head on his shoulder—

But when he spoke of Beth, his questions brought only monosyllables from Will Cody, only the curt announcement that she seemed to be well, and that she had met a few of the women around Salina —little more. One day Kirby brought the matter to an issue.

THEY were returning to camp after a fruitless day. Against a hill the smoke of the grub-fire was trailing slowly upward; the few soldiers were riding their horses about a knoll for their evening exercise; the faint voice of the camp-cook bawled the prowess of Buffalo Bill to the prairie-dogs, the rabbits and the lone stretches of the great expanse about him. Kirby rode closer to the buffalo-killer.

"Will," he asked, "why don't you want to talk to me about Beth?"

The other man stared in simulated surprise.

"Why Tom, I never said I didn't want to talk."

"I know—but you've acted. Is there anything—"

Cody turned in his saddle.

"Well, I didn't know," he said boyishly, "jest how you'd take it. I guess you might as well know it now, though, as after while. Seems kind o' like you aint goin' to patch it up, Tom. This here Maitland—"

"What has he to do with it?" The question came angrily. Cody shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothin' much—except that he seems to be over to Salina a lot. Fixed it up at the Fort to be transferred there with Company D, thet's moved in ahead o' the railroad. An' he's with her most o' the time. Taint that so much, though, as what he says."

"Says?"

"Well,"—Cody straightened in his saddle, and shifted uneasily with the knowledge of unpleasant news,—"you know—just mentionin' it to a few o' the boys. I guess they're goin' to get married. He's plumb crazy about her, an' she mentions him ever' now an' then to Lou—so I guess there's somethin' to it."

"Oh!"

Then there was silence again, silence which lasted through the evening meal, and the long session of story-telling about the camp-fire—silence engendered by disappointment, by jealousy, by a feeling of injustice, and somehow, of a lack of fair play. Yet he blamed only himself.

He had brought her here. Innocently enough, he had believed that there would be the same chance for Colonel Halliday as there had been for others—the opportunity to grow with a growing thing, and to take advantage of the time when a great land would be free from strife and danger. But he had been wrong—and he had lost.

SO the days of the hunt wore away, relieved now and then by a futile chase after an antelope, a few tight-sighted shots at the high flights of ducks now speeding northward, or the easier targets of V-shaped flocks of geese. Perhaps too, while the news from Salina gnawed within him, the roping of a coyote, or the stalking of a deer—then back to the task of tasks again, waiting, seeking, eyes ever in the far-away.

Then, at last, the thrill of sighting faint dark moving objects, the long moment of watching until the slow movement of those smudges assured them that they were really objects of the hunt and not some crafty, carefully advancing group of the red enemy—then the creeping progress to the attack, the whoop of Buffalo Bill as he dug his heels into the sides of old Brigham, his all-knowing buffalo-horse, the cracking of the long rifles as, Tom on one side of the big herd, Cody on the other, they sent the thunderous mass forward and edged toward its head so that, one on each side, they might fire the shots that would drop the leaders and cause the whole group to plunge into a stampede.

Then it was that Tom Kirby forgot for the moment the things which had weighed upon him ever since that night under the cottonwoods. Then it was that he lived only for the thrill and zest of life itself, the clatter of maddened hoofs, the quick surge of his horse beneath him, the straining and creaking of stirrup leathers, the spurt of blue smoke from the barrel of his rifle, the sudden swerve to avoid a tumbling object—then on to the race again!

Fire and reload and chase! Swing and duck and counter—driving into the center of the herd to separate it, one half from the other—then straight across the wide, smooth plains, with the snorting quarry roaring on ahead, and with Buffalo Bill bellowing in the distance as he sent old Brigham galloping after the game which must fall to his rifle in order that a thousand men might live and work.

Onward—with the keen bracing air rushing past until it caused the ears to ring, with the hoofs of his horse barely seeming to touch the springy turf, with never a thought for bog or bad ground, with the world swimming about him unnoticed—his eyes on that shaggy, snorting thing which raced ahead, while with both hands free from the reins, his strong knees tightly gripped to the sides of his saddle, his lithe body swaying with the motion of the excited horse beneath him, he waited, cheek lowered to the butt of his rifle, eye steadying itself for the alignment of the sights—then the pull of the trigger, the mad scramble for safety as a thousand pounds of torpedo-speed suddenly somersaulted in the air—a whoop of triumph from the buffalo wagon, then the thrill of thrills all over again.

YET it had its aftermath—when the buffalo wagon was slowly pulling away, on the trail back to the railroad, its forepart loaded with the reeking heads which some day, stuffed and mounted, would advertise a railroad to a whole continent, its rear piled high with the buffalo humps, while the rest of the carcass lay behind to rot where the beast had fallen, and to form one more pile of bones to whiten with the summer suns as a temporary monument to a passing thing. Then it was that Kirby and Cody would halt, to look behind them, then silently to stare at their rifles. The joy of the hunt was gone—remained only the knowledge that they were killers in the cause of a thing known as Civilization, destroyers of life that another life might prosper.

"Still, I guess it's all right," the softhearted Cody would say. "If we didn't kill 'em, somebody else would. An' maybe—you can't tell—the good Lord may've put 'em here to get killed. Funny that way, aint it, there's always somethin' provided! When these here go, I guess, cattle will come along an' take their place, an' if the cattle go, then somethin' else'll bob up. Never can tell how things'll turn out, Tom. Like with you an' the little gal! Might be the finest thing in the world, the way it's runnin'. Or like with us an' these buffaler. Here we are, feelin' like a couple o' skunks for killin' 'em off—an' all the time we don't know but what it's the right an' proper caper, clean through. Don't know but what the good Lord started 'em out that way—sayin' to the first of 'em: 'All right, here y'are. Start raisin' a family, an' do a good job at it, because after while they'll be needin' you when they start buildin' the railroad.' So you can't ever tell, Tom. That's facts!"

THUS a month passed—with its constantly shortening trips into the buffalo country as the grass began to green, with the visits of Wild Bill to the "front," there to sing his one song, to stare vapidly about him and to speak vaguely of the springtime—a man deep in the throes of love. Custer's expedition went forth under the command of General Hancock, and failed even as the expedition of the scouts had failed. The drifting news from Salina brought more and more evidence to Tom Kirby that the information given him by Cody had been correct. Beth Halliday slowly was becoming a part of the life of the little frontier town. She was seen often on the streets, during her daily walks with the Mills children; often, too, she was accompanied by a man in the uniform of a captain of cavalry, Halbert Maitland.

The bonfires burned bright at night along the course of the railroad; the cursing of the bosses grew louder, the singing and joviality less pronounced. Spring was here; the carpetings of the plains were soft with the early wild flowers, raising their jeweled heads for a few fragrant weeks before the scorching heat should cut them down again; the wild grass was springing up in the valleys, and the buffalo-runs were becoming deep cut again with the sharp hoofs of the thousands heading northward.

Spring—and the buffalo running, with the bulls bellowing and struggling for supremacy in the wallows. Spring—with the prairie-dogs barking atop their mounds, watching with pop-eyed curiosity the approach of the grading teams, then with fat agility dropping to the security of their burrows as the strange invaders came slowly onward. Spring, with its bursting splendor, its bank-full streams. Spring with its darting antelope, punctuating in graceful leaps the smooth-rising divides of the distance; with its new influx of "mover" wagons, plodding slowly, doggedly on toward the far West, a few chickens squawking in the crates at their sides, lean horses and gaunt-eyed cattle in the rear, a woman in print dress, and tousle-haired children staring from beneath

the bent-bowed stretches of the canvas wagon-covering. Spring, with life, with movement, with the singing and nesting of birds—and with the stark, grim specter of tragedy ever hovering in the haze of the horizon! The rumors had begun to come; the soft, billowing balls from the signal fires were rising; promises had been only promises!

It meant work—grueling, agonized work—that each joint of track might be one more laid against the time when the grass might grow between the ties and the rust gather where now the wheels of the wheezing old work-locomotive were beginning to impart their first shine to the rails.

LATE one afternoon two boys halted in their play, far at the edge of the little town of Salina. They stared into the distance with rounding eyes, throats suddenly parched, blood drawn by fear from whitened cheeks. There a mile or so away—those moving forms, that slow approach—there horses and men coming forward deliberately, concertedly, like Indians creeping on the warpath, their ponies tight beside them, or—

Suddenly they whirled, their arms widespread, their voices high with the shrilling news. Doors opened. Faces appeared at windows. Women ran forth, their aprons waving, laughing as they called to one another—that they might not cry. Men stared, then turned to spread the tidings, while far in advance those childish voices went shrilling on, carrying the news for which a little town had waited, in strife and in brawling and in hope, news that caused hearts to beat with a sudden joyfulness, which stilled the banging of the pianos, which sent cards scattering upon the tables of the gambling-halls, which vacated the saloons, the stores and the dance-halls—the call sharp and clear with the pure joy of its telling, the call to a new day and a new life.

"The railroad! The railroad! It's at the top of the hill! You can see them working—the railroad! The railroad!"

CHAPTER X

A Dream of Empire

THAT night, at the front of the Kansas Pacific, the bonfires gleamed as they had not gleamed in months. And men were happy.

A town! After forty miles of wilderness, of hopes—and fears, a town, something achieved, a mark of progress upon their tiresome journey! Now the night crew and that of the day labored side by side, nor cared for the strain as, like happy children, they strove to complete their task to its temporary mark before daylight came again. The cursing of foremen had vanished. They too were laborers for the night, eager to swing a pick, to clamp a fish-plate or lug a tie if by so doing they might save a minute to the precious task. Likewise there labored the men of the cook-tent, passing between the lines of workmen with their steaming pots of coffee, and their singsong of: "Grub-pile—grub-pile!" And the men of the buffalo wagon, Kirby and Cody among them, happy to forgo sleep, and to forget the fact that once this task was done, they must start again on their journey out ahead—always the vanguard to feed the hosts who were making possible the carrier that some day would transport the life-necessities of multitudes.

Nor was the thrill of it all any greater to the workers than to the town which, awakened at last to the full realization that the thing which it so long had awaited at last had arrived. With the knowledge, a strange metamorphosis seemed to have come over the tatterdemalion place. In the little church, poorly attended for the greater part of the time since some zealot of the plains first had struggled with its erection, a crowd gathered, there to sing half-forgotten songs of home to the accompaniment of the wheezy organ, and by some strange impulse—to pray. Nor were there lines or distinctions in that motley congregation—the painted woman, her toored lips and highly roughed cheeks showing garish in this gathering, her short, tight skirt with its gaudily embroidered flowers and loosely strung spangles contrasting in grotesque fashion with the full-width print affair of the "decent" woman who sat beside her; the gambler, the bullwhacker, the saloonkeeper and the trader—all were there, a bit abashed, proudly ashamed that they had found their way within the walls, but willing to struggle with the faint memories of a song when once the organ started, the first to bow their heads at the soft voice of some roving parson, fresh from his "mover" wagon, as he announced prayer.

A strange mixture, of wild elation, tem-

pered by sobriety, of shouts tugging at the vocal chords, held in check by strange choking; laughter and tears stood side by side that night in Salina, one mingling with the other, neither advancing lest its companion be close behind. From attics, stored there with the boxes and bales brought overland in year-ago journeys, came colored lanterns, faint memories of other times and other places, when there had been dances "on the lawn" back home, and the hands which now strung them from post to straggling tree were younger and fairer and softer. Flags made their appearance, wrinkled and dusty, it is true—but they were flags nevertheless. With some strange impulse of patriotism men hurried for trunks, dug deep there and brought forth the uniforms which they had worn at Gettysburg, at Antietam or Vicksburg; nor was there the one to say which should take the precedence, the blue of the Yank or the gray of the Reb—for they paraded the streets together. Here, there, everywhere was the spirit of a new communion, of a new understanding—it was as though the town had waited only for this.

THROUGH it all Beth Halliday seemed to move in a haze—as one groping. With the first news of the actual arrival of the road, a strange feeling, a parodoxical excited calm had taken possession of her. It was as though she were about to greet some beloved thing which long had been absent, as though she were waiting, as one would wait for a letter from home. Now she moved about the streets, grim, silent old Cynthia beside her, with a feeling of sudden security, jostling with the crowds as she would have jostled on a holiday with the throngs of "back home." It was as though some benevolent giant suddenly had come beside her, to shield her with his protection, to catch her by the arm and hold her tight, safe from the ever possible danger and soil of contact. She laughed with the joymakers; she joined the throng in the church; she sang—with a peculiar light-heartedness she had not known in months. And when Captain Maitland called to her from the rear of a big wagon, which, loaded with celebrants, was starting toward the scene of activities, she turned in animated fashion to her companion, an excited hand on old Cynthia's arm.

"Oh, let's go out!" she begged. "They're going to work all night—so the railroad can be here in the morning. Let's go and watch them."

"Go on yourself! Lige will want his cup of hot water before he goes to bed. Wont fix it unless I'm there—then he'll growl all day tomorrow."

SO with a good-by, and the promise of Maitland's protection, she ran to the wagon, there to be lifted within, and laughing and joking with the rest, to be jolted out of town, across the two miles of rutty road which lay between Salina and the rapidly advancing lines of steel. There at the rail-head—

Others had come before her; the black expanse at the edge of the bonfire glow was a tangle of saddle-horses, of buggies and mover wagons, of freight teams, of oxen, even, called into use by those unable to procure other means of saddle locomotion. About every group of workers was a crowd, which shouted and sought to aid—and only impeded the labors by its very enthusiasm. Long lines of laborers, dim, bobbing shadows, once they passed beyond the glow of the fires, shunted here and there, calling their warning for the opening of a lane of passage as they dragged ties and kegs of spikes forward, or, a score to a rail, carried forth another segment of the line which, following the grading teams along the level ground, became the resting place for a railroad almost with the turning of the soil.

For here progress was easy. The ground was hard, almost level except for the slight lessening of the grade which brought it only a few feet higher than Salina itself. Swift-working mules, with scraper outfits, pulled and tugged in the wake of plows, to make the insignificant fills and create for the ties themselves a base that would form a roadbed. Stake-men, chain-men, linemen going ahead, checking over work already carefully checked; superintendents rechecking, to be followed by the constant chugging of the ties as they struck the ground, were hurried into alignment, then tamped into place to await the rails—the work went forward, steadily forward, while the crowd grew greater.

The shouts became louder. Here and there the crowd massed so heavily that it was only by main effort that the workmen forced their way through, bellowing in vain their appeals for a clearance. And Beth joined the rest, her every attention

upon the frenzied efforts before her, nor heeding the call at one side:

"Gangway! G–a–n–g–w–a–y!"

Again it was repeated, and for a third time she did not hear. The command became a work-angered roar:

"Out of the way there—look out for these ties!"

She turned swiftly. It was the tie-gang, answering the steady call from ahead, where a new section of scraped ground was awaiting its sleepers. Half frightened, she leaped back, then suddenly stood tense. If it had been anyone but he!

But there he stood, calling his command, his features smudged with dirt, his buckskin suit grimy and soiled, his hat jammed far down on his head, the sweat standing forth on his cheeks in spite of the coolness of the night. Not even taking notice of whom he addressed, he repeated his command, and this time with more insistence.

"Out of the way, there! You're holding up the work! Out of the way—we want to get this road into Salina!"

Anybody but he! And now he had turned slightly, allowing the tie to swing about on his shoulder, to touch her new print waist, slightly smudging it. The outburst came.

"Oh, I didn't know you were one of the laborers!"

He looked at her quickly. His head moved—like one seeking to avoid a blow; the eyes gleamed with the hurt of the thrust.

"Isn't it worth laboring for?" he snapped.

THEN he went on, shouting as he broke the way, without looking back to where a young woman stood with hands tight clenched, not heeding the glaring activities, not hearing the explanations of Captain Maitland, again beside her after a momentary separation. Late that night, after old Cynthia had turned out the light in the living-room and crept noiselessly to bed, it still ran through her brain—the unfairness of her retort, the childishness of it. She tossed and turned in the old-fashioned creaking four-poster; she resolved that when the morning came and the bulge-stacked locomotive made its formal entrance into Salina, there would be one at least, who would not be there to see it. She would not give him that satisfaction—after what she had said last night, and the rebuke he had given her. He was out of her life, out of her mind, out of her existence—that she should lower herself even to quarrel with him, much less to say a thing unworthy of her! That she should even have taken notice of him!

But when the morning came and Captain Maitland called, on the way to the lower end of town where soon a station would rise, and a train come daily puffing along immediately after the new-laid track had been given its finishing touches, and where this morning all Salina would celebrate the end of its isolated life, she was dressed and ready—even waiting on the veranda.

BETH told herself that it was simply because everyone else was going—even though she knew that not to be the reason. All of a sudden an uncatalogued emotion had arisen within her, tugging at her, begging of her—although she could not have known its message. Strange excitements ran through her—she wondered what it was all about, why she should care! This railroad—it could lead her nowhere, bring her nothing. Yet there was the surge of it, the happy excitement of it, the pride of accomplishment—even though she had taken no part in it. Hardly noticing the man beside her, she hurried forward, listening to his talk like one in a dream—his excuses for a temporary absence during the parade.

Yes, it would be all right for him to absent himself. She would be there, watching from the big knoll; she acceded willingly, gladly—she wanted to be alone. Then, it happened; he was gone, and she stood apart, watching the throngs, the crowd forming in the distance where the sun gleamed on the bright band instruments, where the ancient engine puffed and steamed proudly, its tired old body swathed in flags and bunting, where the laborers, happy in spite of tired muscles and sleep-laden eyes, stood in formation behind the troops, where—

The bugles! The shrieking of the engine whistle! The faint sound of brass-throated music, growing stronger, the cheering of the crowds—and a woman turning to weep happily, softly in her husband's arms. The cries that choked even before they began—the rushing forth of youngsters to dance and cavort with the swelling surge of the music. Nearer—nearer came the band, the soldiers, the en-

gine idling proudly along. The workmen thronging beside it, the scouts, the townspeople, joining in as the procession passed, and singing their aimless words to the blare of the band ahead.

Then suddenly it all seemed to fade—as though it were only a screen through which she might look beyond. Beyond, to where the plains which now stretched mile on mile suddenly had metamorphosed into green fields, waving fields, giving up their wealth in full-headed wheat and tossing corn, with the pumpkins growing between the furrows. Beyond, to big houses and bulging barns, to green lawns where now there was only blankness, to children playing in happiness and security instead of the outposts which now watched for the possibility of Indian attack. On to cities, alert and growing and proud, cities which had come because this railroad had come, and because there had been men brave enough to go before it! Cities which meant schools and churches and a new life spreading out into this Western land, which could be as proud and majestic as the cities she had known back East—yes, prouder, for they would be closer to the strength which had given them birth, to the courage by which they came into being!

SOON Beth rubbed her eyes. It all was gone; the band had passed ahead; the old engine had reached the end of the track, and was wheezing there, awaiting the time, when bereft of its finery, it again would begin its chugging duties between "the front" and the source of supplies, far back down the line. The laborers, suddenly tired, now that the excitement had dimmed, were straggling away one by one; only a few of the townspeople still marched, keeping alive the interest which soon must deteriorate from its almost holy aspect to the usual turbulence of a frontier celebration. Only the stragglers, and the too-polite, weak-featured Captain Maitland, standing there beside her, smiling and bowing, and asking her how she liked the parade. And edging about the town, creaking slowly on its way into a new hunting land, went the buffalo wagon, moving always on ahead, its hunters, Cody and Kirby, mere smudges in the dun of the plains, leading the way to farther fields of endeavor. After all, this was only a halting place. The Rockies still lay in the invisible distance.

CHAPTER XI

"Yores Truely, Mr. Hickok."

THERE was little of the air of the celebrant about either Kirby of William Frederick Cody as they took the trail that morning out of Salina and headed toward new hunting grounds along the Smoky Hill. For Kirby the day had been robbed of much of its glamour, even before it had begun. That little interview of the night before, the sarcasm with which Beth Halliday had addressed him, the quick surge of anger in his reply—these things had told him quite decisively that any faint dream of reconciliation which he might have had was hopeless, and started the workings of an element which heretofore had been absent in the mind of Tom Kirby—that of retaliation.

For Kirby was of the plains; he knew the trails; he knew when the first rise came in the Smoky Hill in springtime, the call of a thousand wild things; he could trail a footprint from horseback, or align the sights of a rifle with the swiftness which almost equaled that of Wild Bill or Cody: he knew these things, knew them with the instinctiveness that came from the association of years, ever since the Kirby family had migrated from Illinois and settled just west of Lawrence, the father to work and hope and die, the mother to struggle and teach a growing youth, then follow the man to a land where all are pioneers. These things he was sure of, but they all were of the plains—where woman seldom trod. In it all he could see no breaking of spirit, no weakening of resistance to an inner call which had gone unheard for months; he saw only the surface, and even the sunlit sky was dark.

As for Cody, he hunched and growled in his saddle, swore affectionately at the faithful Brigham and the humanized Lucretia Borgia, all for no apparent reason. He growled at the brilliancy of the sun, grumbled at the fact that railroad laborers had husky appetites, bewailed the roving life of a scout, and at last turned in scowling fashion toward Kirby.

"This here old skinflint Morris!" he burst out. "How does he come to know everything that's goin' on?"

It brought a smile to the other man, in spite of his discouragement.

"I thought you always said he was so godly."

"I never said anything o' the kind. I just give him the benefit o' the doubt. But if he's godly, I'm a flock o' angels. He's flint an' steel an' a couple o' arrer-heads thrown in. But,"—and he wrinkled his brows,—"how does he come to know everything?"

"About what?"

"Our town!"

"Our—our what?" Kirby moved closer. "What are you—"

Cody leaned back in his saddle, roaring for the moment in good humor.

"Aint that just like me?" he asked. "Try to keep a secret, an' then, first whoop out o' the box, bust it! Well, you see, Tom, you aint known anything about it, but you're half-owner in a town. For that four hundred dollars! It's Rome."

"Italy?"

"Nope." Cody leaned closer, in deepest confidence. "Rome, Kansas. Nobody knows anythin' about it. That's the big secret. You an' I—we own it together. That is, we will, as soon's we get started. Somebody else'll have a share in it, but he don't know it yet either, not till I'm ready. Mike Russell, you know—Shotgun Mike. Been lookin' for a place to open a bar an' tradin'-post, an' I figure this is just about it. We'll be millionaires, inside a couple of years."

"But how? Where? What's it all about?"

CODY opened one hand, and with his other traced a map on his palm.

"Know where Big Creek comes down to meet the Smoky Hill? About two miles from where the Gov'ment's buildin' that new fort? Fort Hays, they call it? Well, the survey of the railroad crosses the creek about three miles below there. Now what?" He again leaned back in his saddle. "Just this here—there aint another drop o' water within fifty miles, unless they drill for it, an' that aint likely. So what's th' answer?

Kirby shook his head. "I give it up."

Cody grinned. "Just this here: They'll have to put up a water-tank there. All right—wherever the railroad puts up a water-tank, there a town grows. So we've just switched it around! We'll put up the town first, an' then let the railroad come along an' do the boomin'. Simple, aint it?"

"Yes—except that the railroad owns the land."

"That's just the point!" said Cody with a heavy wink. "The railroad don't own it. I'm the one that owns it—and I've taken you in partnership. You see," he added in close confidence, lest the nearest prairie-dog village should know, "I'm supposed to be drawin' five hundred dollars a month for killin' these buffaler for the railroad. But I really aint. You see, I had the chance to either draw three hundred and fifty dollars real money, or three hundred in cash an' two hundred in land at a dollar an acre. I took the last one—it sounded a lot better. You aint got any idea, Tom, how much it helped my credit. Besides, there's all that land. Course, I've got to take what the railroad gives me, but as long as it's alongside the track, I don't guess it makes much difference. They sort o' spot it out—I guess I must own half the world out along toward th' end o' the road, around Fort Wallace. Anyway, one of the spots they gave me was a little parcel o' land—about a hundred acres—lyin' just this side of Big Creek, right up to the bank, in fact. So that's where Rome's goin' to be. There's seven hills right around there, just like there is in that Italian Rome, an' so—"

"But where does Morris come in?"

"That's just what I'd like to know," boomed the buffalo-killer. "He just aint comin' in—the old skindodger! Wantin' me to give him part of it!"

"But I thought nobody knew about it."

"They don't."

"But surely you must have talked about it, or—"

"Well, I may have mentioned it—you know, around a few of the saloons, or somethin' like that. But I've never talked about it. Just the same, up he comes to me this mornin', fatter'n a hawg, turnin' his hands one over th' other, an' sayin' that he'd like to have a part o' this new town o' mine, just as a sort of good-will offerin' owin' to our long an' delightful friendship. I told him that there was just seven hundred an' eighty reasons why he couldn't. One was that I'd see him in hell first, an' after that th' other seven hundred an' seventy-nine didn't matter!"

"Then what?"

"Nothin'—except that he's goin' to try to sneak in some way. But if he does, he buys buildin'-lots from the new an' thrivin' firm o' Russell, Kirby an' Cody!"

Kirby nodded in accord.

"I think you're right, Bill. Morris

makes his living from real-estate, what living there is to be made. He gets land from the railroad as cheap or cheaper than anyone—so I don't see why he hasn't as much right to buy what he wants. And I think you've got a real proposition."

"Do you?"

"Honestly."

"Gol! I'm glad to hear that. Because," —and the buffalo-killer became boyishly serious,—"you know how it is with me, Tom. Somehow or other, I just don't know what money is. It keeps me in hot water all the time—this money thing. Maybe if I could get way ahead, sometime, it'd help a lot—an' then maybe it wouldn't. But I guess maybe it was my bringin's up. Sort o' harum-scarum, kind of."

THEN the man was silent—a man with a "harum-scarum bringin's up," a man who as a child had seen his father stabbed by a mob for the sake of a principle, who at eight had been the companion of bull-whackers and of outlaws, trudging his way along by day and by night with the great freighting teams of Russell, Majors and Waddell, gaining his meager education from what few books came his way, and from the various renegades of another country, who halted long enough in their flight to point out to him the pronunciation of a word, or the building of a sentence. A boy who had killed his first Indian at eleven, who had ridden pony express at seventeen, who had dared every possible danger of a life that was hazardous in its every hour, a boy who had seen every rough element of a privation-roughened existence, yet who, some way, somehow, had come through it clean and straight and honest—this was the man, scarcely more than a boy even now, who sat there on the plains with Tom Kirby, confessing his one fault, not knowing that it would be with him always, a fault that was a virtue in the very big-heartedness of him.

"I sure wish money wouldn't wiggle through my fingers like it does," he continued. "But I just can't seem to hold on to it. Seems to me I've been rich an' broke all my life. Like right now—aint got a cent, Tom, except what I've given to Mike Russell to sort o' hold out with. Maybe if I get way ahead on this town, I'll sort o' get straightened around. Wouldn't that be fine, though—with Lou havin' everythin' she wanted, an' everythin'? Maybe I'll learn to hold on to it, some day."

Tom Kirby laughed.

"Maybe, Will—but not likely. All you were made for was to let it pass over your palms."

"Gol, I guess that's right. They sure are shiny from it slippin' over!" He rose in his saddle. "Huh! Aint them buffaler out there?"

AND the chase was on, to be repeated many times in the days to come, for the railroad had halted at Salina only for a long-enough space to establish a new headquarters, moved there on flatcars from Junction City, to bring up its supplies, then to go roaring forward again. Time constantly was growing shorter. The stages were running now with extra guards. Settlers were beginning to leave their cabins and seek the larger towns for safety. Here, there, everywhere, were the brooding rumors of the outbreak soon to come. Work moved with fevered haste; each day might be the last. And one day Cody, who had ridden into Salina for a quiet look at the railroad survey to assure himself again of his plans for the stalwart town of Rome, waved from afar to Kirby when again he neared the buffalo wagon, and approached him on the gallop.

"Guess I've got to do the huntin' for a while by myself," he announced. "Custer's sent for you."

"For what?"

Cody scratched his head.

"Hell's broke loose," he said finally. "Somebody at Washin'ton's put his finger in the pie, an'—well,"— he straightened in his saddle,—"maybe it's right. But maybe it aint. They say it'll stop the trouble, I'm thinkin' the opposite way."

"But what is it?" Kirby's voice was testy with apprehension. Cody went on:

"Well, to use th' official language, it's just a matter o' confinin' certain Injuns within certain limits and inclosures," he explained. "But to th' Injuns, it's goin' to be just plain prison. Most o' these things that've been happenin' aroun' here lately—you know, the raids on the stations an' what not—have been blamed by th' agents on that bunch of Dog Injuns, the Sioux an' Cheyennes, that've been hangin' aroun' the Littler Agency this spring—just why, I don't know. Maybe,"—and Cody smiled sarcastically,—"it's because they don't belong there—don't belong much o' any-

where, in fact, an' them bein' aroun' just eats up that much more supplies, since th' agent has to give 'em somethin' to keep 'em off the warpath, an' that cuts down th' amount he can steal an' sell through the tradin'-posts. So th' Injun Ring's gotten hold of it in Washin'ton, an' it sees a fine chance ahead. Send 'em all down to Fort Crobbe, blame all th' outbreaks on 'em, make a lot o' provisions for 'em, an' then let the good Lord be their guide—an' th' Army holdin' the sack."

"Why?"

"Cause they've shifted it aroun'—so Custer says, and o' course, he told me all this just between us—so's th' Army had to give th' order for 'em to be taken down there; th' Army's got to do the guardin' an' keep 'em there, an' then, if the rest o' th' Injuns get mad about it an' take to the warpath, th' Army'll get blamed. So it looks like this is goin' to be a fine year for the Injun Ring. Stacks o' money, plenty o' smoke, an' lots o' game on th' old huntin' grounds back there in Washin'ton. Wisht I was an Injun-lover; might pay off my debts." Then suddenly: "Nope—didn't mean that, Tom. Guess I'd rather be bothered about where I was goin' to get bed an' board for Lou an' the baby. I sleep good o' nights, anyway."

Kirby nodded.

"Yes—even if you do have to help with the fighting. But what am I to do?"

"You?" Cody cocked his head. "You've got a nice job. Custer's sent Troop H over there to do th' escortin'. They're all green men. They need somebody to lead the way on down to the Territory. He wants you right away at Salina—he's come over there now."

"It'll start plenty of trouble, Will."

"Aint I said so? But there aint any way out. The orders came from Washin'ton. Guess maybe you'd better be startin', Tom. The General's waitin'."

FIVE minutes later Tom Kirby was riding for Salina, there to report at the railroad offices, draw the pay which awaited him, receive his brisk orders from the impetuous Custer, then to seek the little hotel, where by the grace of the management he maintained his sole relic of home—a haircloth trunk stored in a dingy corner of an upstairs hallway. Kirby had remembered that a certain portion of his wages must go to Lige Morris for the carrying out of a voluntary bargain, even though the recipient of its benefits might hate him, might even love another man. Besides, he was going away.

With a certain boyish pride—nor would he confess even to himself that it was because of that sarcastic remark the night of Salina's railroad celebration—he prepared for the visit. That he would see Beth, he felt sure. That he wanted her to see him in some other garb than the one in which he had inevitably appeared at their every meeting since he had come into the West, he would not admit. Yet he hired a room and dragged into it the trunk, there to bring forth his "best" clothes, the long-tailed coat, the high hat, the tall boots, still shiny from their last polishing—an outfit which he had worn but seldom since its purchase two years before, one which he had saved "for nice" and which, in brighter days, he had planned as a wedding outfit.

Quite deliberately he arrayed himself, seeking by the brushings of his warm hands to smooth the wrinkles from long-packed garments, and for a time mourning the workings of a stray moth upon what once had been a beautiful hard-based bow-tie of the fashion in vogue—which, through the cloth-covered base, allowed a quick fastening by merely snapping of the stiff background into place. But it was the only one he had, and so he wore it, striving his best, by a refolding process, to hide the moth-holes. Then arrayed at last, the wrinkles detracting but little—for wrinkles were more or less of a common occurrence—he started forth.

A GIRL sat on the veranda of Lige Morris' dun-colored house, and Tom Kirby felt a sudden quickening of his heart as he approached. He wished that he might think of something to say that would tell her everything in a sentence—that he knew she was in love with someone else, that he wished her well, and that he hoped that the coming of real love would make her more charitable to others—or words to that effect. But some way his brain seemed to have become muddled; he thought of so many things at once, and the blood rushed so to his temples! Perhaps, after all, it would be best merely to inquire for Mr. Morris in a quiet, businesslike tone of voice, be extremely polite, yet cold, then pass on to the interview with no further notice of her. Or—

Then he turned in the rickety gate, and

halted in surprise. It was not Beth Halliday who sat there, but another—more frivolous in her dress, her hair fluffed about her face, her mouth pursed in an angry pout and one slipper-clad foot tapping with pent-up anger against the old boardings of the veranda floor—Caprice Jordan, in Cody's words, "the widow of the Army." Disappointment and relief surged through Kirby at the same moment. At least, he told himself, there would not be the embarrassment of a meeting—and this in spite of the fact that he had dressed himself in his best for that very eventuality. Now—

He removed his silk hat with a wide sweep and bowed in as courtly fashion as possible. There was no telling who might be within.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Jordan. And is Mr. Morris at home?"

She looked up with a slight lessening of her pouty expression.

"No! Goodness no. Nobody's home. I'm waiting myself."

"And of course, you don't know just when he would be home?"

"Mr. Morris? No, I don't. He went away this morning—in quite a hurry. Took the morning stage. I don't think he told anyone when he was coming back. Least of all me! You see, I'm just visiting here until Father gets his place fixed up. We all had to move over in such a hurry. Isn't it terrible, being in the Army?"

Kirby agreed that it was, then glanced somewhat wistfully down the street. "I was rather anxious to see him. I'm—going away myself."

"Oh, how interesting!" She had indicated a chair beside her, and Kirby, halting in obedience, yet wishing in spite of himself, had accepted. "Where?"

"Just on—just on a little scouting trip. Well,"—he started to rise,—"perhaps I'd better be going."

"Oh, don't!" She said it in pouting imperiousness. "Don't run away so soon. And leave me here ready to cry my eyes out!"

"Over what?" The sudden confession had caused the man to turn quickly, in dismay. Weeping coquettes were hardly for him. The girl suddenly launched into a series of questions.

"Have you seen Mr. Hickok?"

"Why, yes—for a moment."

"Where?"

"Downtown!"

"But where downtown?"

"Oh, just around."

"Wasn't he,"—she placed a hand on his arm,—"wasn't he gambling?"

"Well—"

"Of course he was!" She leaned back in her chair. "Down there playing cards, when he knows that I'm in town! Oh,"—she stamped her foot again,—"I'm so mad at him, I could—I could—"

"But maybe he thinks he oughtn't to call on you until evening. Or—"

"Well, he could at least walk by."

"Did you tell him he could?"

"No—but he ought to know enough to, oughtn't he? He's just being stubborn, that's all!"

"Why?"

"Because's he's mad. Because I took your part—with Beth Halliday. Last night."

"My part?"

"Yes, we were all here. Captain Maitland, Beth, Willie,—that is, Mr. Hickok—and myself. Your name came up, and I said I thought you were one of the finest gentlemen I ever had known."

"But—er—" Tom Kirby stared. "But you haven't known me."

"Well, I've heard about you. Anyway, Willie had been cross as a bear all afternoon and I just thought it would do him good to know—and besides, Beth had said something that I didn't like—I can't remember just what it was now," she added with an offhand brush at her hair. "It doesn't make any difference—just some remark that you could take any way you chose. And *I* thought it was derogatory, and I said so. Of course, she denied it."

"Oh, did she?"

"Naturally. What woman wouldn't? And when I took your part, Willie, got mad as a hornet, simply on account of that! Now I suppose he'll stay down there and play poker until he's black in the face. Well, he's welcome! There are other fish in the sea. Oh!"

SHE had halted suddenly, staring at Kirby's tie, while the man flushed and stirred uneasily. Then:

"Oh! Isn't that a shame! And you've probably not noticed it!"

"Er—what?"

"Your tie. That awful hole in it!"

"Oh." Tom's hand went fumblingly upward. A sudden mothering instinct be-

came assertive in Caprice Jordan—an instinct which had sent more than one soldier plunging dizzily about in a sea of infatuation. She reached forward and for a moment toyed with the frayed adornment. Then:

"I think there's some black silk in my bag. I could fix you a new one in just a few minutes. I'm awfully good at it. Really, I've made just lots of them for the boys."

"But,"—Kirby again looked down the street,—"I ought to be going—"

"Surely not like that. Now there—come on inside. I can do it in just a minute—really, it wont take any time at all."

"But—I'm going to take it off—"

It was the beginning of a short argument which ended as Tom Kirby should have known it would end. Caprice Jordan, was at that moment without a visible admirer. Besides Caprice Jordan was angry, and hurt, and looking for surcease from gnawing thoughts. Within the dreary old living-room, she fussed and fumbled about in her work-bag for a moment, at last drew forth needles and materials and thread, then sewed quickly and silently at a task in which she had become adept through many a repetition. There is nothing which places one in such close communication with another as the fastening and fitting of a tie.

On a chair opposite, Tom Kirby, red-faced, uncomfortable, watching the door and wanting anything in the world but a new necktie, waited dolorously while the operation went on, hardly noticing the girl as she looked about her, stared for a moment, then with a sudden inspiration hurried to a table and began to cut a stiff cardboard backing out of something she had picked up there. A few moments more of work and of rattling conversation, and the thing was done.

"Now!" She rose, and bending over his shoulder, removed his moth-torn tie. But Kirby hardly noticed. His gaze suddenly had fastened on the ruins of something upon the floor, the amputated representation of a man, evidently standing beside a fringed, plush-covered pedestal. The head and shoulders were missing, in the blankness of an oval invasion for the making of a tie-backing. Only the legs and hands and feet were there, and the gold-lettered imprint of the Leavenworth photographer where the picture, with much pain, torture and some expense had been taken a year before. To say nothing of the thick-inked, bold-lettered inscription:

To Miss Jordan
from
Yores Truely,
Mr. Hickok.

"Why,"—it came with a gasp,—"you've cut up his picture!"

She unfastened his old tie and began the fitting of the new one, her arms loosely about his neck.

"Certainly—I had to have something, didn't I? Besides, if he doesn't think anything more of me than to—"

Then she looked up, with an embarrassed little laugh. Beth Halliday stood in the doorway, her eyes blazing, while, looking on in weak-featured surprise from behind her was Halbert Maitland. A long instant, of staring, of shuffling about in the chair, of red-faced discomfiture—then a form brushed past them, almost sailing, it seemed, her wide-gored dress flouncing, her lips pressed into a line of outraged anger; a door slammed and Beth Halliday was gone.

STILL red-faced, Tom Kirby rose, and silently slunk from the house, like a schoolboy caught in a covert act. But halfway down the block, he began to chuckle with a realization of sudden happiness. Soon he was laughing—then whistling, his heart lighter than it had been in months, he went gaily on, back to the hotel, to the changing of his wardrobe, and forth to the street once more. When a woman can be angry—because another woman has seen fit to be kind—

It was good news, it was hopeful news. He almost forgot that he was riding—at the beginning of a long, irksome, distasteful journey. Almost forgot that there had been bleak days, dark days, days in which the world had seemed impossible of continuance. Almost—

Then suddenly he jerked to attention as a form, in cut-down buckskin, rode hurriedly beside him—California Joe, his hair streaming about his face, his eyes wild, hands extended over his horse's neck.

"Ride, yer darned fool, ride!" he bellowed. "Stick them spurs in thet there pony, an' ride as yer never rid before!"

"But what—"

"Don't yer ask no questions! Yer ride!"

Kirby obeyed. An instant later, his

pony thundering beside that of California Joe, the wind whistling in his ears, he headed forth toward the open plains. For a half-hour the journey continued, while the older scout looked over his shoulder time and again, dug the spurs deeper into his horse to add a new spurt to the speed which Kirby must attain, then finally five miles from town, to allow his frothing mount to come to a halt. Kirby stared at him in amazement.

"What on earth's the matter with you?" he gasped. Again California Joe looked back and rubbed a hand over a damp forehead.

"Taint with me," he answered. "Hit's with yer. Now thar's the trail. Keep on goin'—an' goin' good. Wild Bill's a-lookin' fer yer with blood in his eye, war in his innards, an' his fingers on the triggers!"

CHAPTER XII

The Seven Hills of Rome

"WILD BILL?" Kirby asked it with a sudden realization of the seriousness of an innocent situation. "What on earth—"

"He says thet there aint no man thet's goin' ter wear his pitcher for a necktie an' keep on livin'," California Joe announced gloomily. "Special, the way hit was did."

"But how—" Kirby still groped in amazement. "Surely he doesn't think—"

California Joe halted him with a nod toward the distance.

"Better git on, Tom. Wild Bill, he aint fitten ter be met up with right now. Special, sence the hull thing was tol' him in front er ever'body in Con Kelley's gamblin'-hall. Tain't nuthin' but honor now fer Wild Bill ter start shootin', frien' er no frien'."

"Who told him?" Sudden anger flared.

"Who'd yer s'pose? Cap' Maitland. Came bustin' in thar an' let it all out so's ever'body could hear. Like he was wantin' fer ter git Bill in a hold whar he couldn't draw out. Well, he done it. I reckon the best thing fer yer ter do, is ter ride."

"But I wont. I'll—"

"Son," said California Joe calmly, "yer'll ride—either thet, er ye'll have a awful lot er frien's speakin' nice about yer. Taint sense. Go on whar yer goin', an' take yer time comin' back. Give me an' Cody an' a few more a chancet ter do some talkin' an' persuadin', like—Bill's li'ble ter wake up ef yer give him a mite er time. So ride, son, ride!"

Tom Kirby rode,—with a heart, however, that had more of heaviness than of fear. A good friend had departed—the way of many good friends—through the foolish whim of a woman. Wild Bill had carried his grudges of honor before. Wild Bill had given his warnings. And Wild Bill's twisting speed as those long arms shot to his belt where the ivory-handled revolvers waited, butts in for quick action, had resulted in Wild Bill remaining alive, while those who had sought his death dropped before their swift-working palms could fan the hammers of their guns. Even the eight outlaws of the McCandless gang had been unable to shoot quicker than Hickok. And now Bill was looking for Kirby!

There was none of the coward about Tom Kirby; neither was there any of the foolish bravado that would send a man to death without at least some concern. That the foundation of it all was silly, made little difference right now. Kirby had no means of telling what Maitland's version had been, how great the exaggeration, how twisted the recital. He only knew that when he returned from his mission, he must face Wild Bill—in a fight for a woman about whom he cared nothing, whom he hardly knew.

IT was therefore with a feeling of disquiet that Kirby went forward to a disagreeable task. And he found Cody's prophecy correct. When at last Tom reached the agency, it was to find a mourning aggregation—a grim collection of Sioux and Cheyennes, "dog soldiers," as they were known, or malcontents from the various tribes, who now must travel into what they looked upon only as a form of prison and of slavery, as an object lesson to those greater numbers who might be preparing for the warpath. That it would be a boomerang, Kirby felt sure—just as he knew that the private opinion of Custer was to the same effect. But it had been ordered from Washington; besides, Kirby was no more than a scout, a pathfinder, and he took his position at the head of the long, trailing caravan without a protest.

The procession moved slowly and in silence during the greater part of the day, as the braves, their guns and ammunition taken from them at the agency before departure, walked in wordless, blanketed lines, mere shuffling stoic machines, obey-

ing because they could do nothing else. The camp criers were silent—there was no news of the day. Everything had been told—they were going to prison, to slavery; nor could the military or Kirby convince them otherwise.

Far in the rear came the squaws, papooses strapped to their backs and staring out with wide, brown eyes at the strange, cavalcade about them, the shambling Indian mothers, the tired, bony horses, each dragging a travois, the rough sticks of its framework cutting deep lines into the dusty soil of the plains, the inevitable dogs, hungry and lean, following in the rear.

A silent and suffering journey, the soldiers slumped in their saddles, the horses coughing with the dust, the prairie dogs staring at them from the tops of their little mounds, then popping into invisibility at their approach. Silent—except for the shuffling of moccasined feet, the slow pound of horse-hoofs, the scraping of the travois on sun-caked ground—silent, yet screaming its message to the camps of the various tribes where chiefs gathered about the council-fire, and puffed and smoked from the tomahawk pipes, puffed and smoked—and bought guns.

Silent—except at night. Then all changed; for when the tepees were up, and the fires burning, when the moon had risen and the plains were a great expanse of soft shadows and dim lights, then came the slow, ghostlike dances of mourning, the weird "Chee-te-eet-ee-ee-ee-ee, chee-te-eet-ee-ee-ee-ee" from the squaws, beginning their cries of suffering and of travail, the slow beating of the tom-toms, the shuffling and twisting of slow forms, dancing to the measured, almost funereal beat of the drums.

Then it was that knives, carefully concealed from the prying eyes of soldiery, came forth, to hack at the first knuckle of pain-stiffened fingers, to sever the digits and leave the stump to heal about protruding bones—the self-inflicted torture by which the Sioux and the Cheyennes carried for after years the story of deep mourning. Then the criers went slowly about, their high-pitched voices wailing something more than the mere news of the moon's rise, or the coming of the buffalo. Now there was a story to relate, one that traveled back into the years, the tale of a mighty race which had risen, strong and stalwart, proud and unvanquished—until now.

Night after night it was the same—the ghost dances, the dances of slow mourning. There were no "*omahas*," no twisting, writhing contortionistic frenzies—only that slow circling, that steady dip and step, dip and step about the big circle, with the tom-toms beating in the center, and the wailing of the squaws continuing unabated. So went the tiresome, trailing journey far into the south and the territory where awaited the stockades and the beginning of an enforced life. The Dog Soldiers now were miles from their accustomed haunts, their arms and ammunition gone, their ponies depleted to only the number necessary to drag the packs containing their tepees and few possessions. They were in a country of which they knew little—away from the buffalo-lands, from everything which they called home. Here, Tom Kirby prepared to leave them; his work was done.

THE transfer of orders and commands was completed, as one group of troops gave to another the keeping of their hostages. The heavy supply-wagons were loaded with fresh reserves against the return march. There came the sounding of the bugle; the start was made, Tom Kirby again in the lead—for their return must be made by a quicker route.

A half-day's march, and Kirby suddenly reined in his horse. Along the rutty road leading from Fort Menken, a trader's wagon made its appearance, plodding away the miles to the south. Tom Kirby knew the answer: Soon a message would be delivered to inquiring Indians, down there in the new reservation. The Great White Father would have become very angry. The Great White Father would have decided that the Dog Soldiers must be punished anew. The agent would be sorry, very, very sorry—but he could only obey the Great White Father. And only a part of the supplies which had been promised would be forthcoming. But there would be a new trading store—at which the few remaining possessions of a mourning race could travel over the counter, in return for the necessities of life.

And how did they always know, these traders? The question annoyed Tom Kirby. It was as though some guiding mind directed them, some one who knew the every action of the Army almost as soon as that Army itself knew—allowing preparations to be made, plans to be laid, agents to be "seen" and bribed, honest

men turned to thieves, and thieves made greater scoundrels. But again—he was only a scout, only a man to ride ahead. Washington was to him a vague, distant thing which he had never seen, something that lived for him only as a crucial point of endeavor during the War of the Rebellion. And he knew the ways of the real rattlesnake far better than he knew of its human counterpart. He could only return to his starting-point and make his report to a serious-featured, golden-haired man who paced the floor, petted his dogs—and said nothing. Then back to the railroad—and excitement. For Cody was there, to seize him by the arm and lead him aside, almost the moment he dropped from his horse.

"Gol!" came the hurried exclamation. "I've been waitin' for you. It's ready!"

"The town?"

"You bet!" The buffalo-killer beamed. "Tom, you ought to see it! Must have a thousand people there already. Worked a diff'rent scheme. Told 'em they could come on it, pick out their lots—an' pay later. Must be a thousand people there now. The minute Mike set up that tradin' post an' bar, they swarmed like buffaler flies on a hot day. Wore a new rut in the plains gettin' there—honest!"

"But so quick—"

"That's just the way it happened. Overnight, almost. I started Mike out the day you left. No sooner'd the word gone around than ever'body came flockin'. Rome's a reg'lar town now! I've just been waitin' for you—to make our triumphal entry! Billy Comstock's goin' to shoot for us till we get back. An' I'm for movin' right now!"

DURING the excited day which followed, Kirby had little time to ask questions. But that night—when, Mrs. Cody riding sleepily beside them, her baby on her lap, the two or three additional recruits from Salina who had joined them at the end of the railroad tagging in the rear, they moved slowly along on the beginning of their journey—Kirby leaned toward his comrade.

"About Wild Bill, Cody—"

The buffalo-killer scratched his chin.

"You aint mad at him, Tom?"

"I? Why, of course not. I'm as sorry as I can be about the whole thing. I—"

"Then I reckon you'd better stay out of his way. We're all doin' everythin' in the world—talkin' to him an' tellin' him things that he ought to know, an' shakin' in our shoes for fear he'll start shootin' at us for doin' it. But it aint worked yet. He don't see anything but that a man who'd been his friend went an' done him a mean trick. That's you."

"I'm sorry, Will."

"So'll be Bill, after he thinks it over. But he's awful in love right now. So keep your ears to the ground. An' move when you hear a rumble."

A command which Kirby felt he could not do otherwise than obey. It was one thing to evade a battle. It was another to give a good friend a chance to come to his senses. With this settled, the journey went on.

A DAY and a night and another day after that. Far west of the railroad were they now, almost a hundred miles within the limits of the untouched country—and nearing a point of dreams, for Buffalo Bill at least. All day he sang, and rode his horse far ahead that he might seek to gain a sight of the place which he had brought to life. All day he joked and laughed, pinching his smiling, adoring wife on her red cheeks, or booming at the baby, as, with some sprig of wild flower, or the whitened skull of a rabbit, he rode beside her—anything to provide her a plaything. Sunset came, while Cody's voice became louder than ever.

"We'll get there just in time to see everythin' a-boomin'," he announced to Kirby. "Pianos goin'—they've moved two of 'em over, you know—lights swingin' in the tents, dancin' goin' on—" He swayed happily in his saddle. "Guess I'll have to cut a few capers in the varsovienne myself, just to show 'em that I aint stuck up, even if I did start the place!"

Then away he rode again, while Kirby moved to the side of Mrs. Cody, and together they talked of the joys to come, of the thrills that would be theirs in seeing a town rise and prosper, the railroad arrive, civilization drive steadily onward. They dreamed together, this young man and this woman, once of staid old Frenchtown, St. Louis, but now thoroughly and forever of the West; dreamed of the time when the Rome of Kansas would equal its namesake of age-old fame, when there would be schools and big buildings and commerce and a part in a nation's upbuilding. They talked of the place which would be the "Cody Mansion" with its big lawn, its

transplanted trees, and a fountain in the front yard, a wonderful iron affair, with three cupids holding an umbrella. They talked of many things which centered about their town of Rome, as the moon rose and as Cody went back and forth, back and forth, too excited to hold to the slow pace of the others, talked of hopes and wonderful accomplishments and—

But Cody had halted far in advance, raised in his stirrups, staring. No shout came from him, no excited waving of the arms. He merely sat there, a graven image in the half-light, until they rode beside him, and in stark amazement sat blank-eyed, merely looking. They were at the seven hills of Rome. But there in the distance no rows of tents showed themselves white and ghostly in the light of the western moon. No pianos banged. No crowds thronged and milled. Only one gleaming ray was there—radiating from the open door of Mike Russell's combined store, bar and gambling emporium. The rest of Rome—

Was gone!

CHAPTER XIII

One Kind of Duel

MIKE RUSSELL, thin, wiry, blond "mutton-chops" growing where later ministerial "Lord Cheltinghams" would flow from his cheeks, explained the tragedy from the steps of his almost deserted emporium. Within, a bartender yawned, sleepily attending the wants of the remaining bullwhackers who had not yet traveled on. The gambling-room, at the other side of the long frame building, echoed the clicking of a few vagrant chips. The trading store in the center was empty—Mike must look to new fields of endeavor, and in nervous, agitated manner, he broke the news.

"They just all walked away on you, Will," he announced. "Lige Morris beat us."

"Lige!" The buffalo-killer turned excitedly to Kirby. "There! Didn't I always tell you he was a old skinflint?"

Kirby did not answer. In spite of his disappointment, there was a certain element of humor to Cody's announcement. Kirby remembered several arguments to the contrary. Russell continued:

"He must have friends in Washington, Will. Must have! Don't see how he could have done it if he hadn't—because the railroad men don't seem to know much about it. All they can tell is that they got orders to put the tank and station about two miles down the creek, about a half-mile from Fort Hays, and that Morris is going to get every twelfth lot for laying out the place."

"Like to lay *him* out!" groaned Cody. "An' me killin' buffaler to feed the men to build a railroad that goes an' takes a town away from me!"

But Russell had held up his hands and cocked his head.

"Now, there, Will! Don't you feel that way about it! 'Taint the railroad's fault! No siree, not by a jugful! Fact is, they want to see you—willing to give you ten acres for one, a little farther out, just to make up for this thing. There's politics somewhere, Will—and it must be back in Washington. You know how it is—them struggling along, trying to get help with bonds and all that—they've just pretty near got to do what they're told, if the right person does the telling. No, Will. I wouldn't blame the railroad. It's just that we aint diplomats."

"We aint much o' anythin'," mourned Cody, with a sweeping glance about the bare moonlit space that once was Rome. "They all moved out, huh?"

"Yes—today. Morris got in from somewhere—and went through the town makin' the announcement. 'Twasn't an hour until somebody decided maybe he'd better get over where the new town was going to be and pick himself out a good spot. That started the rush. One minute Rome was all here, doing fine. The next minute, it seemed, the whole thing was going over the hill."

CODY grunted. He again surveyed the vacancy of his lost empire, and rubbed a hand over his forehead.

"Well," he said slowly, "I reckon I'm broke again!" Then with a realization of the presence of his wife and baby, he turned. "Guess you d better go in here an' wait, Lou—until I ride over to this here other place an' see if they's anywhere that I can put you up for the night. Tom'll look out for you."

"Of course."

The buffalo-killer turned sadly to his horse then, while Kirby led the way within, and found a chair for Mrs. Cody in the trading-post, while Mike Russell tiptoed

from bar to gambling-room with the all-important news:

"No cussin', boys! No cussin'! Ladies present!"

The command brought immediate obedience. Kirby stood for a moment beside Mrs. Cody, sitting silent in the chair, the baby cooing and laughing in her arms, not knowing that a mother and father that night had suffered tragedy—half-comic though it might have been, but tragedy nevertheless. Kirby leaned closer.

"Tired?"

"A little." She said it with that quiet resignation which seemed a part of the plains—that feeling in which the bad was accepted with the good, in which hopes rose, flourished, budded, then withered before they could bloom—only to give way to the nurturing of fresh dreams, and the roseate vista of another chance on the horizon. "It—was a rather hard trip. And then—I feel so sorry for Will."

But nothing of her own sorrow, nothing of her own disappointments. Only a little fatigue from a long journey, and sympathy for another. Presently, worn out, she began to nod. Tom Kirby tiptoed away, into the gambling-room, where the dealer asked his questions in whispers, where cards were laid gently on the table, and a rattle of chips caused scowls, blacker than a summer storm-cloud. For a time he watched the play, then turned curiously at the sound of hurrying footsteps. A negro trooper had entered.

"Mistah Tom Kirby?"

"Yes."

"Buffalo Bill, he done sent me to say yo' bettah be ridin' back—on account of de pahty he was talkin' about. He say yo'd know."

"Yes—thanks." Mechanically Kirby handed the man a half-dollar, and stood staring moodily after him as he departed. There could be only one meaning to that message! Wild Bill!

IF Cody had seen fit to send a messenger, instead of waiting until he could impart the information himself, if there were the necessity for haste—Kirby swayed slightly with indecision. Then suddenly he straightened, one hand going instinctively to his belt. There had come the sound of rushing hoofs, a quick reining-in, a soft swish as a man dropped to the ground—steps on the hewn door-log, and after that—silence!

Silence—and Tom Kirby could not see around the partition. He only knew that some one had rushed to the building and come within—that he had paused at the door, waiting, for what, Tom Kirby did not know. That it was Wild Bill he did not doubt; whether the man was reconnoitering the ground before him or merely waiting until Tom should come forth from the gambling room, that he might slay him as he rounded through the door—there was no way of telling. Yet this latter was unlike Wild Bill. His manner of fighting was something different—to wait until his adversary's hand had nearly reached his belt before ever a muscle of the killer stirred; then with that peculiar cross-handed draw, to flash forth his revolvers and fire, even before the man to whom he had given the advantage had been able to level a muzzle in his direction. This quiet, this sudden stealth were not like Wild Bill. Yet he was out there; of that, Tom Kirby felt sure. And for only one purpose—to kill him!

Frenzies and panics shook the entrapped man. Was it not enough that he was about to fight a man with whom he had been friends, and against whom even now, he bore no enmity? A killer whose bare announcement that he was "looking for his man" was virtually a sentence of death—Wild Bill, whose only scars were those inflicted by a grizzly-bear; even that had died at his hands, knifed to death, after the animal had torn his arms and shoulders. Wild Bill, who now waited out there in the trading-post room, silent, not moving, not calling forth his usual warning to come forth to battle, battering down Tom Kirby's strength of resistance by his very stealth!

Kirby glanced in desperate fashion toward the card-players, and gave thanks that they had not noticed his agitation. A window was open. It called to Kirby—with its chance for safety, its opportunity for a slinking flight, a quick leap for his horse and a race for life. And it had its appeal—any man thinks twice before he goes deliberately to death. But something held him back. Was this Wild Bill's scheme, to prove him a craven, to stop him when he struck the ground, and there, held before all the Western world as a coward, force him to fight? Tom Kirby straightened. With a sudden rush of desperation, he threw open the door and swung through it.

"All right, Bill Hickok!" came in a voice strangely hoarse. "Here I am!"

He halted! The man stood with his back to Kirby, lean face slanted in gawking fashion over his shoulder. For just a second his left hand moved jerkily, as though in motion toward a revolver—only to cease. The right still remained motionless. Wild Bill was a prisoner! At last:

"Well—go on! If ye're skunk enough—when thar's ladies present!"

BUT Tom Kirby only stood and laughed, his hands at his sides. Wild Bill had not counted upon the presence of Mrs. Cody, nor of a tired, half-asleep baby. He had halted, in natural surprise as he entered the door, and he had allowed one hand to drop within the range of a tired, clasping baby fist. Now he stood in bondage, a long finger of his right hand tight-grasped; nor was there seemingly much chance of freedom. It all had happened in a last hazy moment of drowsiness. Arta Cody, like her mother, was fast asleep. Kirby moved closer.

"Looks like I've got the drop on you, Bill," he said softly. The other man scowled.

"If ye're skunk enough—"

"But it isn't that kind of a drop!" Tom went to him then and caught at his free hand. "Don't you know, Bill, that I wouldn't shoot a friend? Not the kind of a friend you've been to me? Don't you know that this is just what I've been wishing for—a chance to talk to you—to show you—"

"Don't yer say a word ag'in'—"

"Not a word, Bill. Not for the world. And why should I? The whole thing was innocent, just an accident; that's all. And—if you'll let me say so, a compliment to you."

"Me? Huh!" But just the same there was a slight amelioration in the tone. Kirby went hastily on:

"Just what I said, Bill. We might as well be frank about it—she's got many an admirer. It just happens that I'm not one of them—you ought to know that. But if I were, and this thing had happened with me—like it has with you—I'd feel mightily cheered up—like I had a chance."

"Huh?"

"Truth, Bill." Then quickly he told the whole innocent story. And at the end: "Besides, if you ever do get her, Bill—you'll know that you've a mighty good-hearted little woman. Anybody that'll take pity on a man with a moth-eaten tie—"

"Well, I reckon thet's right." Bill was smiling at last. "She sure is a angel! I'm—I'm—awful glad, Tom."

"So'm I, Bill."

"Shake!" Then forgetting that his shaking hand was occupied, he swung suddenly around, disconnecting a finger from a baby fist. There was a stirring, a wailing cry—the voice of a mother. Wild Bill stared.

"Gosh! Woke 'em both. Never meant it, Lou. Sorry—but anyway, I reckon Will's comin' most any minute."

Tom Kirby rubbed a hand over a wet forehead.

"Well, I'm glad he waited as long as he has."

"So'm I, Tom." Then to a form just dismounting without: "They're right in here, Will."

BUFFALO BILL halted on the steps, staring at the two grinning men.

"You two derned fools!" he announced, as though Kirby had sought the battle as well as Hickok. "Huh!" Then with another outburst of happiness: "You two derned fools! Come on, Lou. Got a place for you. Don't know how we'll pay for it right now, but—I reckon we'll manage."

Then, suddenly old, with memories of his departed glory, Buffalo Bill led the way without, there to stand gazing sadly about him. Kirby went down the steps and took his arm.

"There, Will!" he begged. "Don't feel that way about it. Maybe the town wouldn't have prospered, anyway. It would have been a lot worse to have seen it start and then die than to have had things happen this way."

"I guess so, Tom. But I sure aint burnt up with joy as she stands."

"Of course not." They were moving on now, Kirby having mounted and riding beside Cody, Mrs. Cody and the baby in the lead. "But then, Rome isn't everything. There's still the whole West left, and plenty of time to build in. Besides, didn't Mike Russell say the railroad intended to make a trade with you, ten for one or something like that?"

"As if I'd take it!" Cody snorted. "No siree! I'm through with this here land thing. All I'm goin' to do from now on is to try to save an' scrape enough together to pay you off that four hundred dollars,

an' after that, I aint never goin' to owe nobody as long as I live!"

"But you don't owe me now, Will! We took our chance together."

It didn't satisfy Cody.

"Don't pay my debts that way, Tom—it's either got to be fair shakes, or no dice. Maybe they'll give me part o' that in money or—"

"Wait a minute, Will." Kirby leaned closer. "I've got a little idea. If that's all that's worrying you, go ahead and make your settlement and then give me the deeds. I'll take them as full payment. What's more, if the land ever turns out to be worth anything, I'll count you in for your part of it. You see," he laughed, "all I owe the Cody family right now is my life."

Wild Bill, riding slightly ahead, turned and chuckled.

"Guess I owe Arta a little bit myself," he announced. "Shucks! Guess if I'd ever had the heart ter've done it, once I sot my eyes on yer, I'd ha' spent my last cent settin' yer up in a cemetery all yer own. By the way, Will, yer aint needin' a little money?"

"Well—" Cody scratched his head. "I just made up my mind I'd never borry another penny's long's I lived. But if you happen to have fifty, Bill—"

"Sure. An' I'll take land too, Will, if the time happens when yer aint got the cash."

"I aint li'ble to ever have anythin'," answered Cody sadly, "less'n it should just roll in faster'n I could count it. Then I guess I'd spend the derned stuff 'thout ever known' where it went."

"Well," Tom laughed, "what's the matter with that railroad settlement squaring up everything? We'll make it a partnership of thirds. How about it, Bill?"

Hickok pulled at his long mustaches and winked in the semi-darkness.

"Sure would be gilt-edged inves'ment. I'll go up an' start a town m'self an' show Will here how ter do it."

"Needn't mind showin' me, Bill. Still," —Cody turned in his saddle to view again the remains of what was Rome,—"this town done somethin', anyway. It's the first time I aint been head over heels in debt since I can remember. Goin' over to Hays City, Tom? That's what ol' flinty-skin's called it."

"No. Guess I'll turn back here. Mike will put me up somewhere."

THEY halted then, for a few minutes of badinage and a good night. Far to the right, a horseman, riding rather unsteadily, passed them, moving toward Mike Russell's bar. He was inside when Kirby returned. Tom sought the gambling-room, there to watch the play for a while, yawned sleepily, and turned for the bar and Mike Russell. The proprietor, taking the "last trick" for the tired bartender, reached for a bottle.

"Nightcap, Tom?"

"No. Don't think so, Mike."

Then, as he leaned against the planks waiting for closing-time, he became aware of a figure which slid toward him, pushing a whisky-bottle along the bar as he came. Tom Kirby turned, eyes narrowed, lips suddenly drawn. The intruder waved a hand.

"Ha' one on me, then," he ordered a bit thickly. Tom Kirby merely looked at him, without answering. Again the invitation:

"Th's all right. Ha' one on me. Cel'-bratin' a little tonight. Go on—ha' one on me! Go' taken in a li'l deal today—sort family thing." He grinned in half-drunken triumph. "Be goo' fell'. Ha' one on—"

Kirby's lips parted for the barest part of a second. "I drink with my friends," came curtly. The other man leaned unsteadily back.

"Oh, tha' so? Tha's int'restin'. Drink wi' your frien's. Wouldn' drink an'body you're jealous of, huh?" He laughed. "Tha's int'restin'. Ha' tell Beth tha'. Ha' tell Lige. Waitin' f'r him now. Wants make prop'sition Mike here—f'r hotel. All in Hays now," he continued, with evident forgetfulness of his original train of thought. "Yeh. Moved over. Lige's town. Started it. I'll ha' part of it. Me—an' Beth. Ha' drink?"

"I said no! And stop mentioning that name!" Red flashes were dancing before the eyes of Tom Kirby, quick surges of blood which turned his face white and red, then white again. The man leered at him.

"Oh?" His lips curled sarcastically. "Oh? Tha's why, huh? Won' drink wi' man, cause he's jealous. Huh! Ha' tell that to Beth. Wont drink wi'—"

Then he looked up, curiously. Tom Kirby had motioned.

"Pour the drinks!"

"Huh! Tha's better!" He reached uncertainly for the glasses and drew them closer. "Tha's better. Way man oughta

talk." The liquor dribbled from the bottle to the rims of the heavy glasses. "Tha's better. Well—Army greetin'! How!"

Tom Kirby said nothing. Chalk-white now, he merely reached forward, grasped the glass, raised it slowly, then with all his strength threw the contents in the face of Halbert Maitland.

CHAPTER XIV

And Another

FOR an instant the befuddled man only groped and blustered. Kirby went quickly forward, pulled the army revolver from its holster and passed it over the bar. Then, in compliance to the inquiring glance of Mike Russell, he relinquished his own guns, and stood waiting.

The soldier turned, his features purple.

"You'd insult an officer!"

He turned for his gun, only to find it had disappeared—then, with a hurried glance, to notice that Kirby also had disarmed himself. His fists clenched—he plunged forward, his arms milling, his head bowed for the attack. And Kirby caught him, just as he wished to catch him, the blows which were raining about his head and shoulders hardly noticed in the satisfaction of it—caught him and shook him, feet from the floor, shook him until his head rocked, then threw him half across the barroom.

Then, a thin smile on his lips, he waited —until the man could come cursing to his feet, until he should rush again to the attack, only that the strong brown hands of Kirby might once more seize him, clean strength against sodden strength, and for a second time throw him away, unharmed, that he might come on again.

Here was a duel to his liking, one to his satisfaction! A duel with a man he hated, because he had stolen a place which should have been his. Again and again he met the futile charges of the seething Maitland, —who now, through his anger and his exercise had almost fully recovered his sobriety,—raised him from the floor, swung him about, then hurled him away. But at last there came the time when, slightly off balance, Tom Kirby met the onrush unbraced, and for an instant went backward, finally to touch the bar. The arm of the officer went out—there came a sharp warning from Mike Russell:

"Look out, Tom! He's got that bottle!"

Kirby swerved, in time to see the man squirming for distance, his arm rising. With all his strength, he pushed Maitland from him, then as the splattering weapon started downward, he struck!

A short blow, a wrist to elbow blow—but it carried all the anger which had smouldered in Tom Kirby for months, ever since that day of their meeting in the real-estate office. And it struck fair.

Maitland reeled. The bottle dropped to the floor and crashed there; the knees of the cavalryman sagged; his shoulders hunched—then all acrumple he went down. Mike Russell hurried from behind the bar.

"That was a good blow, Tom!"

THE other man stood breathing heavily, hardly realizing that the fight was over.

"I wish he hadn't gone down!" came through the blur of anger. "I wish he'd come at me again. —You!" he shouted to the dazed man. "Pick yourself up and try another trick like that! Just try it—"

"Oh dear! Dear—what is this—what is this?" A flustered, flabby being had hurried in the door, and now stood beside them, his hands half raised, regarding the man who at his entrance, again had dropped to the floor. Kirby regarded him coldly.

"It's your pet, Maitland!"

"And you've hurt him, terribly—terribly!" Lige Morris had gone to one knee beside the prostrate cavalryman. Kirby smiled.

"Not as much as I should have. He was all right—until I told him to get up again!"

The form of Maitland moved. The half-glazed eyes caught sight of Lige Morris. There came a plea—of extenuation.

"Make him keep away from me. He started it—he insulted me!"

Kirby nodded, in reply to the inquiring glance of Morris.

"Yes—and so that you'll get the details straight—I threw a glass of whisky in his face. I'll do it again, whenever he gives me the same provocation."

"Oh, dear—dear! These things shouldn't be—they simply shouldn't be! Help me with him—the poor man can hardly stand."

Kirby reached forth an arm and dragged the man to his feet. Then with a show of mock politeness:

"I'm sorry I can't give you your bottle too. But it's broken."

"Oh, dear, dear!" Lige Morris still gasped on, his usual flow of platitudes temporarily broken. They walked together toward the door. Kirby heard a mumbled statement, and saw Lige Morris lean closer. Then:

"And while you were blinded by the whisky? Oh, dear, dear!"

The hands of the plainsman clenched anew at the lie. But action was impossible now. Maitland, he knew, no longer could defend himself. So, while the two went slowly out the door, Kirby backed to the bar, and his elbows on the planks, stood staring grimly upward. Presently Mike touched him on the shoulder.

"What will we do about his gun?"

Kirby glanced at it, then extended a hand.

"I'll take it out to him."

"And get shot in the back?"

A smile of disgust. "He's not that game!"

THEN he too went forward, to round through the door, to start down the steps toward a group of shadows at a buggy, then to halt. He had caught the swift muttering of voices, then a sound which chilled him, which cut him deeper even than the taunts and gibes of Maitland—the outraged tones of a girl, tones he recognized:

"Oh! How cowardly—to do a thing like that! How cowardly!"

So she had come too! And now she was listening to one side of a story! For only a moment more he hesitated, then straight, defiant, he walked forward, looking only toward one figure, that of Maitland, as he was placed, groaning, in the buggy.

"Here's your gun!" he said coldly. He extended it, butt first, then walked back to the door, not looking behind him. An hour later, when Mike Russell closed his bar for the night, he locked the doors, and turned out the lights, one by one, until only the lamp he held, half above his head, served to illumine the shadowy building. Then he grunted, and went slowly forward, to touch the shoulder of a man who had hardly moved since the wheels of a buggy had ceased to grate in the distance.

"Forget about it, Tom," he urged. "The man was drunk."

Tom Kirby did not answer—merely followed him to the little lean-to which served as a bunkhouse. And while the stars still shone the next morning, he rode away, Buffalo Bill beside him—once more to the railroad, once more to the thrill of the buffalo hunt, and to a hope of forgetfulness. But the latter would not come.

CHAPTER XV

War-Bonnets

THE old taciturnity had returned to Tom Kirby. He felt that he had fought his last battle—and lost. Nor could he see light to the argument of his friend the buffalo-killer:

"I wouldn't let it eat in on me like that! I'd go right to her an' tell her the straight o' the thing. You never hit him while he was blinded—Mike Russell would back you up."

"And I place myself in the position of a boy bringing in all his friends to verify his story." Kirby flared with anger. "If she hasn't enough sense to see—"

"There, now—you don't know, Tom—"

"That's true." The apology was quickly forthcoming. "I shouldn't have said that, Will. But it does seem strange that she'd fall in love with a man like Maitland. That she'd—"

"But how do you know she has—except from what folks say?"

"And what he says himself."

"Yeh. That's true, I guess." Cody admitted it grudgingly. "If a girl's in love with a man, there aint much chance for somebody else to come gallivantin' along an' try to change her opinion of him. It'd just make things worse, wouldn't it? She'd just think you'd trumped up some kind of a cock-an'-bull story an' love him more'n ever. Well, I guess there aint much left to do, Tom, 'cept to kill buffalo as long as there's work on the railroad, an' then go out an' peck away at Injuns—wishin' ever' one of 'em was Maitland."

"And with Maitland right beside me!"

"Well, I guess he'll be somewheres aroun'—if th' expedition goes out. An' it looks like it was goin', unless all them politicians in Washin'ton can't find a way to oust Custer first."

THE war-clouds were gathering. It was summer now, with the trails hard, and the streams gone down from their rampages of the spring. Every return of the hunters to the camp, where the railroad now had pushed forth its lines by night-and-day

work to a point nearly thirty miles beyond Salina, brought fresh news, fresh food for foreboding. The stages were running only at intervals, and then with three of the lumbering vehicles in a group, the one in the lead, and that behind, crammed with soldiers ready for instant defense. Stations had been burned; Salina was thick with men and women and children who had ventured forth a year before to make the beginnings of a home in the far-off stretches, but who now were flooding in, begging protection. The signal-fires were burning. Here and there about the various agencies great stretches of tepees were missing; nor could the blank-faced agents give any information as to where they had gone. Traders had disappeared from the towns; they were traveling toward where the Indian waited, protected through that unwritten law of safe-conduct which the red man ever gave to those who would bring him guns and the wherewithal to defend what was to him his sacred lands. Settlements had been deserted—everywhere was the brooding foment of war, everywhere watchfulness, everywhere the belief that it could be only a matter of days now until the inevitable summer campaign must begin, with its resultant tragedies. There seemed no other way to provide a lane across this bitterly contested country for the thing which, once completed, would end the warfare in that country forever. The Indian would not fight the railroad, once its trains rushed along the rails. But now—

Now things were different. The buffalo lands remained practically uninvaded except for the few forts and the straggling settlements. There was still a chance, the Indians felt, for the righting of wrongs by the bitter contesting of every foot. There was still a chance, and there was cause!

SO the buffalo hunters worked only until they should receive a call from beyond, out there at Fort Hays—a call to many a day of absence from the railroad. Each trip brought the word of some fresh outbreak, some new danger. Then—

Cody had ridden back from a trip, his face grave, yet alert.

"They've stopped the stage-line," he announced. "There aint more'n one out o' four stations between here an' Denver City that either aint had a massacre or been burnt up!"

"Then Custer is going out?"

"I don't know. Wild Bill didn't know. He was over there—just come from the fort. An' Tom—"

"Yes."

"That there night, when you talked about us goin' halvers—or rather, thirders. Was you serious about it?"

"Of course. Why?"

"Nothin'—only Wild Bill wanted to know. He's got a idee from somebody—California Joe, I reckon—about a spot o' territory out toward Wallace that's got water under it. Says he'd like to go out and prospect, if he don't have to get killed by Injuns first. But I don't guess there's much chance o' that, because I don't think Custer'd take him. Them there bear-wounds o' his has been hurtin' him pretty regular lately, he says, an' Custer wouldn't want him that way. But Bill's sure sot on startin' somethin'—got his head full o' ideas about rose-kivered cottages an' ever'thin' like that. Yes sir—Bill's sure in love."

"Too much even to know anything about Custer!"

"No, 'twasn't that. But just that Custer don't know, himself, I reckon. Custer's in an awful hole, Tom. 'Taint fair—the way that Injun Ring jiggles things aroun' at Washin'ton. I was readin' a paper that'd come right straight out on the railroad from Leavensworth, an' it seems to be hell if he does an' hell if he don't. Havin' to send them Injuns down to the Territory, fer one thing! Course,"—and Cody winked,—"it just couldn't happened that somebody got that there idee an' slipped it right through—knowin' that it'd start thunder poppin', an' that th' Army'd have to move aroun' some, an' that'd mean more contracts—"

"But you say they're holding Custer off."

"Yeh." Cody scratched his head. "That there don't mix very well, does it? Gosh, I'd like to know what's goin' on. Why they should be wantin' Injuns to be runnin' loose an' not let the military stop 'em. Kind o' funny, aint it?"

Kirby shook his head.

"It's a good deal more than I can understand, Will. How's the railroad?"

"Workin' slow. Short o' steel. Most o' the men in Salina—just usin' a small crew. Don't have to kill more'n a few buffaler a day now, for a week or so. Which is lucky, seein' they aint been runnin' any too plentiful, lately. An' if these Injuns

keep on the path, we wont even be doin' that. There'll be grass growin' between the rails."

"Well, it hasn't started yet. So we might as well keep on hunting."

THE chase led them far afield. The heavy runs of the spring had ceased; now it was a matter of watching for the straight lines in the distance which would display the short herd, under the charge of the bull which had won supremacy during the fights of the earlier months, and which now traveled the country regardless of the larger groups of animals. A day passed without a sight of the coveted food, and another after that. Then a streak of luck.

"Get all you can while you're at it!" shouted Buffalo Bill as he gave Brigham the spurs. "They'll be pretty short in camp. Cut the herd in two, an' let 'em have it!"

The surge of the race, the milling and countering and swerving and twisting, the almost incessant crackle of the rifles! Then two men, waiting for the buffalo wagon while the remnants of a herd plunged to safety over a hill. Cody surveyed the shaggy carcasses dotting the plains in scattered immobility for a quarter mile about.

"Guess we can take a turn in with the wagon, Tom," he announced. "If they aint workin' any more men than they have been, this here'll last 'em for a week."

It was, in a way, immaterial to Kirby, except for the chance that it gave to him to learn, at least secondhand, the various bits of news from the scattered districts where lurked the threat of Indian attack. Soon, side by side, they were far in advance of the heavily laden vehicle, urged forward by the curiosity that can come only to men long separated from the rest of the world. The miles traveled behind them. Noon came, and afternoon; a mile more, and they would be at the front of the railroad.

Tom Kirby leaned quickly forward. A brown hand went out.

"What's that, Will?" The other man squinted. Then, silent, they sent their spurs into the flanks of their horses. Five minutes later they stood dismounted, grimly, silently passing a feathered, beribboned war-bonnet between them, each hesitant to read its message, each afraid to speak of what was in his mind. At last Kirby turned, and began to move along, his body crouched, his gaze steadily on the ground. Pony tracks!

The message was becoming too clear for evasion now. Beside him came Cody, staring at the telltale prints; then with a shake of his head, he took the lead, pulling hard at the reins of Brigham as he strode along. A quarter mile, a half! Then with a sudden quickening of his pace, the buffalo-killer ran forward, stopped short and in halting fashion reached gingerly for something on the ground. It was curled from exposure to the sun, and matted. Wordlessly he passed it to the other man. Then with a leap they were on their horses and plunging forward. A human scalp!

Into the dried bed of a stream and out again, up a sharp rise in the jagged ground —and they involuntarily slowed their pace, groaning with the horror of the sight before them. The old, flare-stacked locomotive stood motionless, steamless—a man hanging from the cab window, his arms sagging stiffly. On and about the gondolas were huddled forms, massed there in a last desperate effort at defense—and the head of each showed a round, red-black ring. Here and there, behind hastily upturned earthworks, were soldiers, some on their rifles, some sprawled and bare of clothing —robbed for the bright blue and gleaming brass of their uniforms. A workman lay with one hand clasping his pick, the point still in the ground, forced there by the last blow that he ever would strike for those who some day might ride in comfort in a land of peace and plenty. In all the long, strung-out scene, there was not one moving thing, not one voice to cry out the story of the sacrifice—only the dead, their faces in the dust, or staring sightless to the gleaming sky. The men turned, as if in common accord, to begin their race across the plains to Custer. There could be no turning back now. This was war!

CHAPTER XVI

The Strength of Tomorrow

BETH HALLIDAY sat upon the steps of a crude veranda, a child's storybook open but disregarded in her lap, the children of Major Gibson, to whom she had been reading, standing near by in awed excitement. Everywhere before her there was movement, the champing and

fretting of horses, impatient from the long wait since they had been lined up at the bugle call of "To horse!" Down the company street a supply-train was being put in readiness for pulling out. Officers hurried here and there; scabbards clinked; the sun glinted on bright furbishings.

On the veranda of his quarters General Custer was saying good-by to his young wife, his dogs, inevitable companions of the march, clustered about him. In all the new, roughly built expanse of Fort Hays there was no place that did not exhibit the orderly disorderliness of preparation; the troopers standing in readiness, awaiting the command to mount, the officers hurrying from their men for a last brief conference, then returning to pace and turn, pace and turn, listening for the bugle. On the veranda Custer swung a hand in salute as three figures in buckskin rode past, then went on to take their position far at the head of the column. Beth looked quickly away—one of them was Tom Kirby.

There were few words—yet in every mind was the same thought, the same excitement. The expedition of Custer was starting, its cavalry heading forth into the unknown; with the befeathered armies of Santanta, of Pawnee Killer, of Tall Bear and Kicking Bird and Roman Nose somewhere before them; the summer campaign was on.

Over at the barracks the doughboys (they were doughboys even then—a name given first to a small round doughnut served to sailors on shipboard, then transferred to the infantry during the days of the Civil War because of the large globular brass buttons of the uniform) looked on in silent envy. They were not going, except for the few who would travel with the ambulances. The fighting of Indians was a cavalryman's job, a task for the horse as much as the man.

Across the way an officer in flashy blue turned from a seemingly joking conversation with the flabby Lige Morris, and started toward Beth Halliday. Halbert Maitland was always talking to Morris, it seemed. Now he was before her, his attitude one of careless seriousness.

"About time I joined my troop, Beth."

"Yes. You'll take care of yourself, Hal?"

"Surely. I make a promise—not to do a single foolish thing. Of course, if there should be an engagement—"

"Naturally. I talk as though I were an old campaigner, don't I?"

"Well, you've been on the frontier for more than six months now." The situation was jovially strained. "That's enough to make one a pioneer. And you, Beth—you'll be careful."

"Of what?"

"Oh, of everything." A sudden impetuosity had come into the man's speech, a sudden light in his eyes which told of infatuation, of a mad desire to seize this girl in his arms, to crush from her the air of pleasant reserve which always had baffled him. "Of your health, of your strength, of your happiness."

"Why Hal—of course. Don't be so serious."

"But this is a serious time, Beth."

"Of course it is." She rose. "I didn't mean it that way. Good-by." She held forth a hand. "I wish you every good fortune in the world, Hal."

"And a speedy return?"

"And a speedy return."

"Thanks. Good-by—good-by, dear!"

HE said it hurriedly—nor paused at the look of surprise in her eyes. The bugle was blowing. He was with his men. Down the line the command sounded:

"Prepare to mount!"

Clinking saber-scabbards. The scraping of boots in stirrups.

"Mount!"

A long human machine of blue and brass swung upward.

"Advance!"

Then the sharp shuffle of marching horses. A man with long golden hair swung out from a last good-by at the veranda and swept into position at the head of the moving line. In columns of fours they went forward, the hoofs of the horses striking smoothly, rhythmically, in the steady beat of the march. From far at the other end of the fort, came the muffled music of the band, "playing the boys out," to the going away refrain of the army, "The Girl I Left Behind Me." A woman, standing behind Beth on the veranda, called a choking good-by, as a troop passed, then turned, that her husband might not see her tears. Something began to stir strangely within the heart of Beth Halliday, a contraction to make itself apparent in her throat. She glanced ahead—far ahead. But the scouts were out of sight.

The last column passed—then the wagon-train, with its drivers slouched over the reins, and the mules fidgeting in the harness, balking even at the beginning of the journey. One after another, canvas-covered, wide-bowed affairs, they rumbled past, finally to give way to the ambulances and the rear guard. Still the band played, in the distance.

On the next veranda a tall man stood, long mustaches drooping, a fair-haired girl sobbing gloriously on his shoulder. The cavalry was departing, her cavalry—and in somewhat blank fashion Wild Bill stared after it—like a man with a hint of understanding. Then, just as suddenly, he was only the worshiper again, as turning, both hands to her face, the girl went within, closing the door behind her. Wild Bill hung in trepidation for a moment, pulled at his mustaches, then came to the next porch.

"Don't cry, Mrs. Gibson," he said in rough gentleness. The woman smiled through her tears.

"Oh—I'm all right. I never let him see it. I don't do it often. I always remember that it's—for the West. For tomorrow!"

BETH HALLIDAY slowly resumed her seat, one hand still holding the story-book—hardly knowing it. At the edge of the fort the troops were beginning to fade now—giving way to a steady vista of the wagon-train, and the trailing ambulances, ominous in their foreboding of the burdens which they might carry before those troops marched home again. Before her the children still pointed and laughed and cried out; this was great excitement for them. Wild Bill came rather soberly from the veranda and tousled the hair of the nearest youngster.

"Thet's right, young-un!" he said, half to himself. "Git yer fun out o' it. Yer Daddy wont have much."

Then he moved on, while Beth stared after him, a growing light of realization in her eyes. The West—the West of '67—at last had begun to creep into her blood. The understanding had come to her—of why all this should be, of why men and women should brave this desolate, barren country, why they should even be willing to die. Suddenly she knew!

She glanced toward the children, laughing, pointing. She looked toward Wild Bill, moving soberly away, his back to the troops—a man grieving because he could not go also. Then she looked again out toward where the wagon-train was turning into the freight road, its mules still kicking and protesting in their harness. Again, as on that day when she had stood watching the parade at Salina, she suddenly felt small, puny, an insignificant thing in the midst of great accomplishments. Men were going out to pass long days and nights of constant danger, perhaps to die—that others might live, and living, build. This was not a thing of Today, but of Tomorrow—a sacrifice for those to whom it now might mean nothing, a giving to those unborn—in which everyone in all this great country played a part: Mrs. Gibson, forcing back her tears that her officer-husband might not see her sorrow—Custer and Wild Bill and Cody and Kirby, even light-headed, light-hearted Caprice, with the Army for a sweetheart, and urging her every suitor to greater deeds of valor that they might better deserve her smile. Everyone—but Beth, and she sat with empty hands—hands which worked only for herself. With a sudden access of emotion, she tossed the book from her lap and rose. A moment later, and she was beside Wild Bill, an impulsive question on her lips. But he shook his head.

"Nope, Missy," he answered with a little smile of understanding. "Injun fightin's jest a plain man's job. They don't have no nurses."

She turned back to the veranda again—with a sudden feeling of loneliness, as though she had been left out of something of which she really should have formed a part. The fort was strangely silent, like a house when a family has departed, leaving only the servants behind. The children came back to where Beth sat.

"Aren't you going to read to us any more, Auntie Beth?"

She rubbed her eyes, and smiled. The story-book lay beside her. She raised it, turned the pages and began the innocuous recital. But now and then the voice trailed off—her gaze was out where the expedition was melting into the dust of the plains.

CHAPTER XVII

The Fortunes of War

A BLAZING sun of early August beat mercilessly down through the clear atmosphere of western Kansas upon

parched ground, the gray-blue stretches of sagebrush, the arroyos of sandy-bedded streams—and a command of three hundred and fifty men going stolidly, grimly forward through the dust-clouds.

No longer was it the brilliant cavalcade which had marched proudly away a month before. No longer the gleaming equipment, the bright uniforms, the smooth-groomed horses. All that had vanished—to give place to a dust-grimed, haggard group of men, faces bearded, tall boots dusty, scabbards dull—and their morale as impaired as their appearance. It had not been a good campaign.

Rather, it had been no compaign whatever, judged from a standpoint of success. For a full month now, the action had been in progress, leading first down to the Smoky Hill, then across the barren stretches, to the Republican, and even then onward, westward, and northward, searching, ever searching for the enemy, yet never finding him.

ALL this while Kansas ran red; the stage-line—sole passenger- and mail-communication between civilization and Denver City—regarrisoned its stations, and strove to resume operations, only to find the warriors of the Sioux, the upper Cheyennes, the Kiowas, the Comanches and the Arapahoes in instant readiness for attack, beleaguering the men who had sought to reopen the lanes of travel, sending their flaming arrows through the tiny windows of the stone stables, there to set fire to the hay and other combustibles, and burn the horses. Once more the ruts of the stage-road began to fill slowly with sand from driftings of the western winds. Once more the grass began to grow about the steps of the station-houses. The efforts had failed.

The same was true of the railroad, of the meager settlements, of the pioneers who had worked so hard for the building of their homes. The Indians were ever there; painted, their lances aflutter, their almost bullet-proof shields before them, they surged continually to the attack. But there was none of this with Custer.

"They're always ahead—we never can seem to catch up with them!" There was almost boyish disappointment in his voice as he rode with Cody and Billy Comstock and Kirby, dressed now as they were dressed, in tough buckskin. "What do you boys make of it?"

COMSTOCK, the oldest Indian fighter of the group, was the first to speak.

"Well,"—and he rubbed a wrinkled hand at the back of his brown neck—"I've allus contended thet Injun-huntin' was a trade all by itself, an' thet a trained Injun-hunter could fin' his game mos' anywhars. But I reckon I've been plumb mistook. This here aint nothin' like I ever seed, Gin'ral."

"But they're around us!" Kirby had cut in. "There hasn't been a day but that Cody or Comstock or myself have found pony prints and plenty of them. I've got the feeling all the time that we're being watched—that they know every movement we're making. Don't you, Will?"

Cody nodded.

"That's what they do. But they aint aimin' to let us catch up with 'em. Either they're figgerin' on pickin' out their own shootin'-grounds—or they're jus' leadin' us on a wild-goose chase, while the rest o' 'em cut loose an' do what they please."

Custer pulled at his mustache.

"I'm afraid that's about the size of it. Yet"—and he looked inquiringly toward his scouts—"how do they know? How can they guess what our course is going to be, and where our orders read? They'd nearly have to know that—working as they do without any general system of campaign. Otherwise we would have been almost sure to have overtaken some of the bands. Why is it, for instance, that none of the Indian trails around here have been hunting parties—or just wanderers? Everyone that we've struck have been on the path."

Comstock grunted. "Thet's correck, Gin'ral."

Custer shifted in his saddle, and laughed shortly.

"I'm glad this is an Indian campaign and not the Civil War again," he announced at last. "Because then, I think I'd be doing a good deal of lying awake nights, trying to catch the spy who was learning my plans, or the traitor that was sending them out to the enemy. If it keeps on this way, I'm going to credit these Indians with some mighty good medicine men—ones that can read minds."

The scouts laughed at this—any excuse for humor was welcome these days.

MORE than three hundred miles had been encompassed, and without result—three hundred miles in which there had

been more than one awakening, first to the fact that an expedition, supposedly well supplied and better provisioned, was lacking in its every department. The first week had revealed that boxes counted upon to contain ammunition harbored only collections of stones—mute testimony to the thieving propensities of some one "back East" who was willing to cheat brothers-in-arms even of their right to defend their lives. Bread, hard packed, and labeled with Government seals of 1867, had been found, upon opening, to have been baked in the first year of the Civil War. Bacon was rotten, ham worse—every fourth bag of sugar nothing more than sand. For more than two weeks, now, the command had existed wholly upon what hastily organized hunting-parties under the command of Kirby and Cody had brought back to camp.

Onward—to the Platte, and still westward, while couriers, riding only by night, brought the news that at least a new train of supplies had started forth, and the bedraggled command took hope—only to see that train arrive, bullet-torn, arrow-filled, part of its wagons burned by flame-tipped fire-carriers, the others lugging their wounded into the care of the one doctor. Again a tired command moved on, shunting about the plains upon a checkerboard chase which led nowhere, accomplished nothing—save a growing distrust, a slow grinding down of morale among the men, and editorials in the papers back East. For certain elements in Washington were making the most of it.

A week—of searching, of conjectures by Cody, by Kirby and by Billy Comstock, as riding far ahead, they strove in vain to find the will-o'-the-wisp. The trails were always cold when they reached them, the evidence of the dusty ground always that the enemy was too far ahead to be overtaken by maneuver, or by forced march.

STILL westward, and the difficulties increased. The horses had become lean from lack of forage, the men gaunt and taciturn, who glared at each other in the brilliant sunlight, or blinked weakly, their eyes red slits above blistered cheeks, their skin cut and torn by the ravages of wind-whipped sand, their tempers in keeping with their physical tortures. Day after day life became more grim, more silent; night by night there was less of comradeship about the camp fires, and more of secluded knots of enlisted men, talking in low tones, ever watchful for the approach of their officers. Despondency was beginning to have its effect; hardship had cut deep—and relief was calling to them, from across in Colorado. A name remained unanswered at rollcall—then another and a third and fourth and fifth—a dash in the night, a fear-haunted journey in the shadows, then a new country, a new name—and a new worker in the silver mines, where one did not need to throw away his life to fight Indians for the benefit of others who didn't seem to care.

ORDERS came from General Sheridan to turn to the southward, there to meet the lost command of Lieutenant Kidder, sent with dispatches for the expedition weeks before—and not returned. Long, hard marches, marches in which the scouts rode far ahead, searching, south, farther south—

Then a white horse, far in the distance, dead. The prints of a dozen full-shod mounts, moving swiftly. Pony tracks! A quick search along the stretch of a wide plateau, then downward into the valley of a small creek, where the wild grasses grew high, intermingled with clumps of osiers. There—three buzzards floating lazily, high above; Kidder and his command had been found! There were three more desertions that night; nor could Custer flare with his usual impetuosity when he heard the news. Human endurance had almost reached the breaking-point. There must always be the weak.

And nothing had been accomplished, nothing gained, nothing done—unless it were the lonely burial of a young lieutenant and the dozen or so men of his command, now merely so much gashed and mutilated humanity, their bodies bristling with arrows—men who had died even as Custer had searched for them. Moodily they pushed on, facing the blistering sun and the glaring whiteness of the semi-desert lands by day, shivering at night with the chill from far-away mountains, an expedition defeated without being aware of it—yet still following the dead trails, still hoping for conflict—for by conflict only could there be hope of again restoring to this country anything of peace before the heavy snows should fall again; only by conflict might the roaming members of the various tribes be sent back to their

reservations. And—the conflict did not come.

These were harrowing days, desperate days for the three scouts upon whom the safety of the whole expedition depended—Cody and Comstock and Kirby. The three men kept far afield in different directions, heedless of the personal danger which it brought them, their sharp eyes ever on the horizon, for hint of bobbing forms, the flutter of a headdress or the rearing of an Indian pony. Tom Kirby gave a slight degree of thankfulness—at least, his errand took him away from the command and the proximity of Halbert Maitland, now bearded and grimy like the rest, yet with something more of confidence than the others. Tom Kirby could attribute it to but one thing—the fact that the man lived in the future, for the time when the command should turn back from the chase and he should return to the fort, there to find a girl awaiting, a girl who had placed her trust in him.

IT was not a good line of thought for a man harassed by danger and privation. Kirby was glad to rid himself of it—glad even to accept extra duties, to rove afar at night, hoping by this strategy to gain some information of the watchers which Custer felt sure were attendant upon his every movement. And on one of these trips he suddenly dropped to the ground, his every nerve atingle. Some one was approaching camp from the hills—stealthily, creeping, seeking to evade the sentries.

He waited. The form reached a gully and disappeared there, then showed once more, a mere blur in the darkness, then faded again. Long minutes passed—there came no challenge, no popping of a rifle in its signal of discovery. Hurriedly Kirby went forward and to the tent of Custer.

"Sir, was anyone else detailed tonight for scout duty?"

The General looked up in mild surprise.

"No—Cody and Comstock are both asleep."

"Then why, sir, should some one be out of camp—and return without giving the countersign?"

It was an unanswerable question. They went forth, summoning Cody and Comstock as they passed their tent, to assure themselves of their presence. A lantern flickered. Kirby leading the way, they went forth to the investigation. The dry earth was broken in the gully. Farther on—there showed the print of a cavalry boot. And at this, Comstock scratched his head in perplexity.

"Wal," he decided, "thar's one thet thought better about desertin'. Looked kind er skeery ter him, prob'ly, an' he come back."

Custer laughed. It was a welcome explanation. The next day it was forgotten; there were other things—among them a dot on the plains, far away.

Closer—closer—then the glasses displayed a bobbing form in buckskin. A mile—then a mile more. At last, beard flying, battered hat slanted over his head, California Joe reached the command, yelled greetings to the men at the head of the column, and sought the General. He carried orders.

CUSTER read them with eyes that were weary, eyes that were tired—eyes which carried something of heartbreak.

"Well, you'll have company on the return trip, Joe," he said slowly. The old scout nodded.

"Yeh—Gin'ral," came in a quiet tone of sympathy. "Hit seems ter be pretty well known. But—"

Then he went closer, and leaning far from his saddle, put a hand on the officer's shoulder. He whispered—something which caused the golden-haired man to stiffen suddenly, his face white, his lips in a thin, grim line. But that was all. A moment later he had given his command, far down the line, a faint cheer started—then faded away. For this was not a time for cheering; Custer's command was moving back—defeated.

The thin, scrawny mules twisted in the harness of the supply-train. The whips cracked—the inevitable curses came from the drivers. Horses, their heads low in the terrific heat, jogged wearily on, not knowing that their homeward journey had begun. And slowly, one by one, far in the hills, the signal-fires began to burn, flashing the news from chief to chief, from tepee to tepee and tribe to tribe: Custer had turned back. Until the snows should fly again, Kansas, red, reeking Kansas, belonged again to the man of the arrow, the war-bonnet and the tomahawk!

The later chapters of this memorable epic of our West bring it to a climax of exceptional power. Be sure to read it—in our forthcoming November issue.

The Buried Alive Club

"False Lights" describes one of the most exciting of all the exploits of the Government men who compose that curious organization, the Buried Alive Club. Mr. Stockbridge is at his best here.

By FRANK PARKER STOCKBRIDGE

"I'VE been checking up and tabulating the arrests and raids we've made in the last six months, and I want you to look over these figures and tell me what they mean to you."

Stanley Miller, reputed the most resourceful of all the squad of men whose duty is the enforcement of the Federal laws against the sale of narcotics, commonly called "dope," laid a sheet of paper on the desk. The younger man looked up with a smile as the other spoke, and motioned his visitor to a chair. Instead of accepting the invitation Miller strolled to a window and looked out across the harbor.

The office occupied by Evan Lewis, Special Treasury Agent, is on the sixth floor of the New York Customhouse, on the Battery side. Practically nobody outside of the Government service ever hears of Evan Lewis. Very few, indeed, of the servants of Uncle Sam themselves know much about the man or his work. The few who actually are privileged to know something of the ceaseless but hidden activities of the particular branch of Federal secret service in which Treasury special agents function, have always reckoned him as possibly the most brilliant of the whole corps of men whose job is to nip smuggling in the bud.

Lewis studied with cold blue eyes the paper which his visitor had handed him.

"You seem to be looking in the right direction," he said at last.

Stanley Miller turned from the window with a smile. "I wondered if you would see it the way I did," he said.

"It is as plain as the nose on your face," responded Lewis. "Every five weeks, regular as clockwork, you pick up a new flock of dope-peddlers, raid their headquarters and capture a new supply of dope. The supply of narcotics coming into New York is apparently replenished at these regular intervals. The period is just about the time it takes a slow boat to make the round trip across the Atlantic, allowing a reasonable time for discharging and taking on cargo at each end."

"That's just what I had figured," smiled Miller. "I've been going over the steamship arrivals in the *Herald,* however, and I can't find one whose regular trips correspond with these dates, or even approximately tally."

"It might not always be the same ship," suggested Lewis.

"I think it's much more likely that it is," replied Miller. "It is a large-scale operation. Most dope-smuggling is done by the 'black gang' and the other members of the crew, and occasionally an officer; but they are mere pikers. This stuff is coming in too big a volume for that. It is either brought as cargo or concealed about the ship, with the connivance of the officers, in my opinion."

"How much is involved, would you say, in each shipment of dope, assuming for the moment that your theory is right?" asked Lewis.

"Judging by what we have been able to pick up, I should say not less than half a million dollars' worth, at retail, of cocaine, morphine and heroin, are brought in each time."

"That's big enough to command serious attention from Uncle Sam, I should say," was Lewis' comment. "You've checked up on all the steamer arrivals?"

"Only New York—and I can't find a ship which fits the theory," said Miller. "That's why I came to you. Ships are more in your line."

Lewis sent a messenger for the reports of steamship arrivals at all Atlantic ports. With these before him, he compared them with Miller's memorandum.

"Here's one that tallies!" he cried. "The *Cambodia* makes the round trip from Naples and Mediterranean ports to Boston in almost exactly five weeks. And every time the *Cambodia* has arrived in the last six months, it has been from four to six days before you have begun to uncover a fresh supply of dope in New York.

"The *Cambodia's* your ship," he went on. "She is due in again tomorrow. Want me to run over to Boston with you and give her the double-O?"

"I would have to get permission from Washington," replied Miller.

"So would I," said Lewis. "I'll call up the Department right away."

TWO hours later the two men took the Merchants Express for Boston. It was hardly daylight when they boarded the revenue cutter to meet the *Cambodia* at quarantine. As the staunch little Government craft slipped along among the green islands of the most beautiful harbor in America, Lewis said to Miller:

"There never has been a ship which was as thoroughly searched as the *Cambodia* will be this trip. I'll take charge of that job, and I want you to get a good look at every passenger. From what I hear of you, Miller, there are not many people engaged in the drug traffic whom you don't know by sight. There are not so many passengers on the *Cambodia* but that you can at least take a look at every one of them. I don't suppose we'll find anything in anyone's baggage, but you might just happen to run across an old acquaintance. If you do, let me know, and I'll introduce you to Captain Williams, and we'll find out what he knows about the chap."

Miller followed Lewis up the swinging ladder from the cutter's bridge to the upper deck of the *Cambodia*. The rest of the Customs men swarmed up after him. The passengers were already gathered in the saloon with their hand-baggage, making out their Customs declarations or waiting the arrival of the inspectors for instructions. The *Cambodia* was an old ship, carrying principally freight, but with accommodations for about two hundred one-class cabin passengers. At this season of the year she seldom carried half of her capacity, and on this particular occasion there were fewer than seventy-five names on the passenger list.

In less than an hour Stanley Miller had, without attracting attention to himself, given every one of the *Cambodia's* passengers a thorough looking over. He did not recognize a single face among them. None of them had any of the earmarks by which he had learned to recognize the drug *habitué*. None of them appeared to be the sort of person likely to be engaged in the illicit drug traffic. Passing out on the forward deck, he glanced up at the bridge and saw Evan Lewis leaning over the rail, surveying the crowd. Lewis beckoned to him to come up, and upon his arrival introduced him to Captain Williams, the commander of the *Cambodia*.

"Did you see anything of a man named Larpen among the passengers, Miller?" asked Lewis.

"Is he a tall, slender man with a black mustache? Yes, I noticed him."

"I have been asking Captain Williams whether any of these passengers have sailed with him before," Lewis continued. "He tells me this man Larpen has made five successive westbound trips with him, counting this one. That's rather interesting, isn't it?"

"Very interesting indeed," responded Miller. "I suppose Mr. Larpen's luggage and stateroom are due for a particularly thorough overhauling."

"You bet they are," replied Lewis. "I haven't spotted the man yet, myself, but I want to take a look at him as soon as possible."

"He seems like a very fine gentleman, Mr. Larpen does," remarked Captain Williams. "I have had him at my table every trip. He speaks perfect English, but I think he is a foreigner of some kind. He is connected with a big wholesale drug-house in Philadelphia as a buyer in Europe, he told me."

Lewis and Miller exchanged a significant glance.

"There is Mr. Larpen now," said the Captain, pointing out a man standing by the rail on the deck below them, well apart from the crowd. As he spoke, the man turned and looked up. He raised his hand and smiled with a flash of white teeth.

"I think your job is cut out for you, Stanley," remarked Lewis, as the ship came alongside the pier. "If I were in your place, I'd follow this man Larpen from the time he leaves the ship, and see where he goes, whom he sees and what he does."

"That's a very practical suggestion," responded Miller. "I'll follow it."

"I'll see that his baggage is searched first of all, so as to save your time," Lewis promised. "I am going to stick around until everything aboard this ship has been opened and looked into. That may take us two or three days. Let me know what you find out about Larpen, and if I am not back in New York, leave word where I can reach you."

FIVE days later Stanley Miller again entered the office of Evan Lewis.

"Well, whatever there was on board got past you, all right," he said with a touch of sarcasm in his voice as Lewis greeted him.

"You can take it from me that there wasn't a quarter of an ounce of dope on board the *Cambodia* this trip but what was in the surgeon's stores," replied Lewis. "Why? Are they at it again?"

"More dope has turned up in New York in the last two days than in any similar period since I have been on this job," replied Miller bitterly. "It tallies exactly with what I expected when we discovered that the *Cambodia's* arrival always preceded a flood of this sort. What I can't help wondering is whether you and your Customs men did not, after all, overlook something."

"What did you find out about your friend Larpen?" asked Lewis, ignoring Miller's last remark.

"He told the captain the strict truth," replied Miller. "Larpen took the first train he could get out of Boston for Philadelphia. I traveled with him all the way. He went at once to the offices of Saunderson & Co., where I found upon inquiry that he has been their principal foreign buyer of drugs and chemicals for the past ten years. He speaks all the European languages, and is himself an expert chemist."

"I can't imagine a man being in a better position to conduct smuggling operation," was Lewis' comment. "I am certain, however, that Mr. Larpen did not bring anything of an illicit nature on the *Cambodia* this trip. There was nothing in his luggage. There was nothing in his stateroom. That stateroom will have to be rebuilt before the *Cambodia* can sail again, or else be locked up for a couple of voyages. We literally ripped it apart. And every item of merchandise in the *Cambodia's* cargo that could possibly contain drugs of any kind has been opened and searched in the appraisers' stores at Boston. The whole ship was searched before anybody had a chance to get anything ashore, and I give you my word, old man, there wasn't a grain of dope aboard."

"I am curious about this Larpen fellow, however. What do you know about Saunderson & Co.?"

"There isn't any question at all about them," replied Miller. "There isn't a firm in the country that stands higher or that has coöperated more effectively with the Government in the effort to keep the traffic in narcotics in legitimate medical channels. As a matter of fact, they handle a very small proportion of the legitimate supply of the habit-forming drugs. We know all about them, and they are all right."

"That isn't saying that their foreign buyer is all right," responded Lewis. "I will be running down to Washington in a day or two, and after I have talked with my chief, I may take a little trip to Europe for my health. You didn't happen to find out when Larpen is sailing for the other side again, did you?"

"It happens that I did. He has taken passage on the *Mauretania,* sailing next Saturday."

"Well, keep on rounding 'em up as well as you can, and I'll see what I can do to help you," said Lewis, encouragingly.

"By Godfrey, I hope you can, old man!" exclaimed Miller. "If we can find and plug up this particular channel, I am satisfied it will do more to ward off the national menace of dope than everything that has been done so far. I am convinced that nine-tenths of the dope that gets into the market comes from a single source and through a single channel. In some way or other, I am satisfied, the *Cambodia* has something to do with it. This thing has happened too often now to be a mere coincidence.

"Damn it, man! We've got to follow this thing through and run it down. I am not in the Government service for the salary,—Lord knows I've got means enough,—but I am in this work because I believe, with all my heart and soul, that the most valuable service I can render my country is to crush out the drug evil. It doesn't do a bit of good to pick up the peddlers or the agents that supply them—we've got to get at the source.

"From the way it looks now, the United States has got to fight this out alone. Did you see the dispatches the other day, telling that the League of Nations had refused to accept the American proposal for enforcing the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles for international control of the habit-forming drug traffic? Great Britain makes too much money selling opium and morphine to the Chinese to take any real interest in the subject. Just as long as it is possible to buy opium and morphine and cocaine openly in the markets of the world, just so long has the United States got a terrific battle on its hands. And I am in the fight until it is won or I am killed."

Lewis silently stretched out his hand to Stanley Miller.

"I am with you to the limit, old man," he said. "I am mighty glad to find another man who thinks of his Government job in terms of service instead of terms of pay-roll. Do you get down to Washington very often?"

"Not very often, except when I'm sent for," replied Miller. "Why?"

"Ever hear of the Buried Alive Club?" asked Lewis, with a slight lifting of his eyebrows.

"I have heard of it, vaguely, it seems to me—some kind of an organization of scientists, technical fellows?"

"It was started by technical men, but it's not a scientific society, by any means, although there are a great many scientists among its membership," was Lewis' answer. "The Buried Alive Club is made up of men in the Government service who, like you and me, are not seeking political advancement or personal glory and who are much less interested in the measly salaries they draw than they are in the service they are rendering to their country.

"Can you get away for a day or two? I am going down to Washington, and I would like to have you run down with me. When I have a tough problem to solve, I like to talk it over with some of the keen minds in the Buried Alive Club—because every man in there has as his first interest in life the rendering of service to the United States—every one of them is ready at any time to lend a hand to help the others in any way he can. I have a feeling I would like to lay this situation before some of the fellows down there.

"We have only one rule about guests at the Buried Alive Club; no member may introduce anyone who is not eligible himself for membership; and unless the guest, once introduced is accepted as a member, he may never be brought to the Club again. Would you like to go along with me on those terms?"

"I'd be delighted," responded Miller. "I am more than pleased to know that there is such an organization as that, and I certainly want to be part of it if I can in any way be regarded as eligible."

Lewis' response was to pick up his telephone and reserve two lowers on the midnight express to Washington. At seven the next morning they boarded a taxi at the Union Station.

"I sent a few telegrams last night to some fellows in Washington whom I would like to have sit in on this matter," said Lewis. "I have asked them to meet us at the Club at five o'clock. We will have breakfast there, and then the rest of the day is your own, so far as I am concerned, up to five."

A JULY evening in Washington may be endurable under some conditions. For instance, if one can sit on the broad upper balcony of the Buried Alive Club, lounging in a comfortable wicker easy chair,

with a cool drink at his elbow and an electric fan buzzing merrily overhead, looking out across the Potomac to the distant Virginia hills and watching the shadow creep up the Washington Monument, like the gnomon of a huge sun-dial, until only the glittering tip, blazing in the last level rays of the setting sun, remains illuminated—under those conditions he may find peace and contentment even in Washington in July.

It was in such a situation that Evan Lewis found Stanley Miller waiting for him when he arrived at the Buried Alive Club at five o'clock that afternoon. With him Lewis brought a slender, dark, spectacled man, whom he introduced as Arthur Wellington of the State Department.

"Arthur, here, talks forty or fifty languages and can think in most of them," explained Lewis. "We really haven't got very much to go on, but I have a hunch that if we can construct a theory that the four or five men who are going to meet us here will all agree upon as a tenable one, we may arrive at the most probable line along which to work for success. Here comes another of the fellows now."

Lewis introduced Miller to the newcomer, Tom Sheehan of the Bureau of Criminal Investigation of the Department of Justice.

"Tom is the original *Old Sleuth,*" Lewis explained. "There's a couple more coming—Bill Cottrell of the Coast Survey, and Jeff Waters of the Coast Guard. I thought we might need the advice and help of a seafaring man."

"Who's paging a seafaring man?" boomed a voice from behind them.

They turned to greet Jeff Waters, even in his shore clothes looking every inch a sailor.

"We might as well get right down to brass tacks," said Evan Lewis, as the six formed a circle with their chairs. "I'll let Stanley Miller, here, state the case, because it's really his case, and because I want you fellows to get acquainted with him."

IN the space of an hour Miller related the facts as far as they were known, with a precision and earnestness which made a most favorable impression upon his auditors.

"I think we want you in the Buried Alive Club," was Arthur Wellington's first comment, when Miller had made an end of speaking. There was a unanimous chorus of assent. Then Tom Sheehan, who had listened with half-closed eyes, said: "I've got a hunch, but I want to ask a couple of questions first before I tell you what my hunch is."

He turned to Waters.

"As a seafaring man, what would you do if you had a quantity of contraband on board your ship and wanted to get rid of it before you got inside the three-mile limit?"

"You are barking up the same tree that I've been sniffing around," Lewis broke in, with a smile, before Waters could reply. "That's why I asked Jeff to join us."

"I'd throw it overboard," was the answer from Jeff Waters.

"How would you pick it up again?" asked Sheehan.

"That's another question," responded the Coast Guard man. "I'd hate to have the job of trying to pick up anything smaller than a ship, if it were put to me. I've been on enough derelict-hunts to know how hard it is to find a water-logged three-master, even when you've a recent report of her position and a chart of all the currents in the vicinity. It took a full month on the *Seneca* to find the wreck of the *Mary Lee.*"

"How much dope—in dollars—could you put in a package small enough to slip through a steamship's porthole?" asked Sheehan, turning to Miller.

"Anywhere from a quarter of a million to half a million dollars' worth, depending on the length of the package," was the reply. "I begin to see what you are driving at," he added.

"Here's my hunch, fellows," said Sheehan. "Somebody is buying this dope in Europe and getting it aboard the *Cambodia* in passenger's baggage. Somewhere between Naples and Boston, and probably pretty near Boston, they throw the stuff overboard at night in a package that will float, to be picked up by some sort of craft that takes it ashore before daybreak. How does that tally with your idea, Lewis?"

"That's exactly the way I've figured it out," replied Lewis. "I wanted to ask Waters the very question that you asked him, because the hole in this theory is the difficulty—almost impossibility—of finding a package of that size floating out in the open sea, even by daylight. If we can prove that that can be done, with sufficient

accuracy to justify anybody in taking a chance on throwing a few hundred thousand dollars' worth of stuff into the sea, we would have a good, workable theory to go on. There are plenty of places along the Maine coast where a seagoing craft of small size could get in and out without being observed, are there not, Cottrell?" he went on, addressing the Coast Survey man.

"You can do almost anything along the coast of Maine," was the quick response. "There are hundreds of spots where a good-sized ship could slip in and slip out without being noticed. Of course, the skipper would have to know all the channels between the islands. I've dragged that coast for reefs, and I'll take no chances there except on regular steamer routes."

"Just assume, for a minute, that that is the way it is done," suggested Arthur Wellington. "They couldn't pick a better boat for their purpose than the old *Cambodia.* I've traveled on her perhaps twenty times. She is an old-fashioned, slow, single-screw ship, and if you are going to throw anything overboard, there is much less chance of its being sucked in and chewed up by the propellers if the ship has only one screw. Is that right, Jeff?"

Waters nodded assent. Wellington continued.

"Another and very significant thing about the old *Cambodia* is the size of her portholes. The passenger cabins are all on one deck, and the outside staterooms have the largest portholes I have ever seen on any ship. As I remember it, the *Cambodia* was originally built for a company trading up in the Black Sea and wasn't designed for the Atlantic passage at all."

"That's right," assented Waters. "I'm still trying to figure out, however," he went on, "how these dope-smugglers, if they are operating from the *Cambodia,* are able to insure that the stuff will be picked up by the right parties—or at all, if they throw it overboard at night."

"Isn't there some sort of light that flares up when it touches the water?" asked Lewis. "I've seen such things on lifebuoys, it seems to me, but I never paid much attention to them."

"Yes, there are magnesium flares and Coston lights," replied Waters. "The trouble with those things is that they would attract too much attention. I've been thinking of searchlights, too, but a vessel prowling around the Atlantic at night hunting for something with a searchlight would be a great deal more conspicuous than any dope-smugglers would want to become."

"Hold on a minute!" exclaimed Jeff Waters. *"I've* got a hunch! You ought to know about it, Cottrell. You were on convoy duty during the war, weren't you?"

"Yes; but what's that got to do with dope-smuggling?"

"Remember that invisible light we had in the last weeks before the Armistice? You could pick it up with a gadget like the things they use with X-Rays to see the bones in your hand, but you couldn't see it any other way."

"You mean the ultra-violet signals? We used fluoroscopes to see them with. Great things, they were," said Cottrell.

"You see," he explained to the others, "we were running transports in convoys of thirty ships on formation, zigzagging at fixed intervals and running practically without lights all the way across the Western Ocean. Tremendous risk all the time of ramming the fellow ahead or being rammed yourself. Problem was how to show a light which could be seen from a ship following astern and not be seen by the enemy, and some smart chap in the Bureau of Standards worked out this ultra-violet signal."

"That's an interesting suggestion," interposed Wellington. "I begin to see what Waters is driving at. There's Davis of the Standards now. Let's get him in on this. He'll tell us whether there is anything to Jeff's idea."

IN answer to Wellington's summons, Paul Davis of the Bureau of Standards joined the group. Briefly Lewis told him what had been under discussion.

"What do you think of this idea of Jeff's, that this invisible light may figure in the picking up of the stuff after it's thrown off the *Cambodia?"* Evans asked him.

"It's not in my division, exactly," replied Davis, "but I happen to know something about what the Bureau did and how that ultra-violet signal system worked. The first question that occurs to me is whether or not such a signal could be arranged in such a portable form that it could be attached to a package small enough to be thrust through a porthole. I am rather doubtful of that. I'll look into

the matter, however, and let you fellows know. How much time have we got on this thing?"

"Oh, there is plenty of time," responded Lewis. "We've got to accumulate a lot more facts, and it is going to take a good deal of time to discover anything that will justify action.

"Suppose we plan a campaign right here, based upon the theory that Larpen or somebody is buying dope in Europe, getting it aboard the *Cambodia* in passengers' baggage, shoving it out through a porthole about the time the ship gets in sight of Boston Light—that then it is immediately picked up by some craft, which, sailing without lights, has been trailing the *Cambodia,* waiting for a signal of some sort, and that it is taken ashore, presumably somewhere up on the Maine coast.

"Now, that program involves covering a lot of territory. Frankly I am a single-hand worker, and I'd just as soon some one like Tom Sheehan planned the campaign."

"I'll do everything I can, but this is your project, not mine, and I don't want to butt in on another fellow's game," protested Sheehan.

" 'All for one and one for all,' " quoted Lewis. "Neither Miller nor I is hankering for glory."

"Very well, then. The first thing to do is to get a better line on this man Larpen," said Sheehan. "I should think that would come in Wellington's department. You don't happen to have a consular agent or somebody like that sailing on the *Mauretania* next Saturday, do you, Arthur?"

"We are sending a good man over within a few days," replied Wellington. "I don't see why he couldn't go on the *Mauretania* as well as on any other ship. Once on the other side, I could easily arrange to have this man Larpen kept under surveillance for an indefinite period."

"Do that, will you?" asked Sheehan. "It ought not to be much trouble to find out just what sort of dope he buys, if any, and where he has it delivered; and while we can't search him over there, or even search the ship until she gets inside the American three-mile limit, if we find he is buying dope in large quantities, we will at least have something tangible.

"Now, I am going to play that's true, and that we have already got the goods on Mr. Larpen. Somebody ought to arrange to go over in time to come back on the *Cambodia's* next trip, if Arthur's man reports that Larpen is preparing to sail on her."

"I think I can arrange it. If I can't go myself, I'll get somebody else of our special agent corps for that job," remarked Lewis.

"Miller, I would suggest that you try to follow back on the trail of the dope from New York, northward and eastward, toward Boston and the Maine coast, and see what you get in the next four or five weeks," Sheehan went on. "If this theory we are working on is correct, there is somebody down the New England coast with a ship, possibly a fast yacht, presumably a private harbor, and probably a country house that is beyond suspicion, which would be actually the landing place for smuggled narcotics. See if you can pick up any clues that point even faintly to anyone who is situated like that. You may be surprised at what you will find."

MILLER readily acknowledged the wisdom of this line of tactics. Sheehan turned next to Cottrell of the Coast Survey.

"You might be able to coöperate with Miller," he suggested. "Go over your Coast Survey maps of the Maine coast in conjunction with him, and figure out the likeliest spot where a seagoing yacht, that wanted to get in unobserved from a point somewhere from fifty to two hundred miles off Boston, might find it easy to do so. After you and Miller have got your heads together on that for a while, I can lend you a couple of men from the Bureau of Criminal Investigation to follow up any clues that you may have. Are we set on that?"

"It will be rather interesting to take part in a game of this kind," assented Cottrell. "I've never had an experience of just this sort, but it sounds as if there might be sport in it."

"Davis, I wish you would get all the dope there is about the invisible light thing we were talking of, and I am going to ask Jeff Waters, here, to lend us the use of a revenue cutter for some practical experiments along that line. Can you do that, Jeff?"

"I guess we could arrange that all right," was the reply.

"Then I guess we are all set," said Sheehan. "I wish you would all keep as closely in touch with me as you find it possible to do and, for goodness' sake, if

any of you fellows get any new ideas about this thing let me have them. Let's go in and eat."

"I am sure I can't tell you how gratified I am at the way you fellows are pitching in to help," said Stanley Miller to the others as they seated themselves around the table. "I had no idea that such teamwork was possible in the Government service. I knew Lewis, here, would do anything he could, but I thought he was the only one."

"Of course, you understand this is all highly unofficial and irregular," explained Wellington. "If our superior officers, the eminent bureau chiefs who think they are running the United States, ever found out we were cutting red tape the way we do, there would be a devil of a mess. I don't suppose the fellows who started the Buried Alive Club anticipated just what is happening, but the spirit engendered here is constantly bringing a lot of good fellows into coöperation to help each other out in getting away with their Government jobs. There isn't a fellow in the Club who is working for fame and glory, and the last thing in the world we want is publicity."

THE *Cambodia* sailed from Boston on the following Monday. Ten days later the telephone rang in the office of Evan Lewis in the New York Customhouse.

"Tom Sheehan speaking," said the voice that answered when Lewis lifted the receiver from the hook. "Can you catch the *Aquitania* tomorrow?" he went on.

"Can do," replied Lewis. "What's in the wind?"

"I'm taking the five o'clock train for New York, and wish you'd meet me at the Astor at eleven-thirty. I'll tell you all about it then," was the reply. "And say," he went on, "I wish you would go into Meyrowitz's and buy yourself a fluoroscope. Davis hasn't a spare one, and I can't buy one in Washington."

"What's a fluoroscope?" asked Lewis.

"They'll tell you at Meyrowitz's. Get one, anyway," answered Sheehan.

It was nearly midnight before Lewis and Sheehan were seated in the latter's room at the Astor, and the Department of Justice man gave the Treasury agent a synopsis of the information thus far gained.

"Just take the *Aquitania* and drop off at Cherbourg and beat it for Gibraltar," Sheehan began. "The *Cambodia* will wait for you there if you are delayed. We have fixed that with Captain Williams. He is a friend of yours, by the way, I believe.

"Larpen will be on the *Cambodia;* and somewhere on the ship, either in his baggage or in some other passenger's baggage, there will be enough heroin, morphine, and cocaine to touch close to half a million dollars, when distributed at retail by the New York dope-peddlers. Wellington's men have a good line on this. Don't let Larpen suspect anything, but the last two nights before the *Cambodia* reaches Boston, keep your eyes and ears open. Go up on the bridge and use the fluoroscope."

"What will I use the darned thing for?" asked Lewis, with a smile.

"Look for lights that are not visible except on the screen of the fluoroscope," was the reply. "We don't know what these folks are up to, exactly, but Davis and Jeff Waters have been making some experiments with ultra-violet signals which are extremely interesting. They might be of little significance except that the combined efforts of Miller and Cottrell have pinned a certain amount of suspicion on an eminent retired physician of great wealth who was formerly an X-Ray specialist and who undoubtedly knows all about ultra-violet lights."

"Do I know him?" asked Lewis.

"Probably," Sheehan replied. "Did you ever hear of Dr. Rockwood-Prentiss?"

"I should say I have!" exclaimed Lewis. "The good doctor was mixed up in one of the first smuggling cases I had anything to do with, a good many years ago. We never got the goods on him, but I have always believed he was the brains behind one of the largest smuggling conspiracies that we have ever been able to uncover. So it looks as if you were getting something on him, does it?"

"Well, he fits right into our theory. He has a big place on the Maine coast which he keeps open the year round. He has a fast yacht which is always in commission. He has a couple of high-powered touring cars, and our check-up indicates that these cars have made long trips at periods which tally with the dates following the arrivals of the *Cambodia* and the appearance of a fresh supply of dope in New York. Also, he has been for a great many years a customer of Saunderson & Company, for whom Mr. Larpen is the foreign purchasing agent. I'm on my way up there now to post a guard of men from our Bureau around his place.

"Miller is going out on the *Seneca* with Waters, and they will be somewhere pretty close to the *Cambodia* all the way from Cape Sable to Boston, or until something happens. They will probably be cruising without lights, and you are to tell Captain Williams to pay no attention to them if he happens to pick them up. But you watch for lights that are invisible except through the fluoroscope, and if you see any such, shoot a radio to Waters on the *Seneca,* telling him all about it.

"Of course, if you should have such luck as to see or hear a package go overboard from the *Cambodia,* you will report that by wireless, too. Wellington gave me two copies of a very specially secret code which the State Department uses for some kinds of work. Here is one for you, and Waters will have the other. If there are any dope-smugglers cruising in the wake of the *Cambodia,* they will probably be equipped with radio, and we don't want to tip them off to anything."

LEWIS boarded the Aquitania the next morning, and precisely one week later stepped aboard the *Cambodia* at Gibraltar. His old friend Captain Williams insisted upon sharing his quarters with his visitor. To him Lewis outlined what he termed a wild-goose chase but which he hoped, and more than half believed, would bring down the game they were after.

With the aid of the Captain an opportunity was found to make a thorough search of everything Larpen had brought aboard the ship, and of his stateroom, with a result, precisely as Lewis had anticipated, that was completely negative. Nor, with all the watching he could do, was he able to detect any communication between Larpen and any of the other passengers. These were a mixed lot—a few American tourists traveling on the *Cambodia* because it was cheap, several Italian-American business men returning from European trips, a few Greeks and a mixed lot of representatives of almost every other European country. Lewis studied his fellow-passengers minutely, trying to form an opinion as to which, if any of them, might be in a conspiracy with Larpen. Nothing that he was able to discover, however, gave him the slightest inkling that all were not exactly what they purported to be.

Steaming a northwesterly course, the *Cambodia* passed Cape Sable early on an August evening. Lewis made his preparations to spend the night on the bridge. The night was calm and moonless. There were enough clouds to dim the starlight, making it an ideal night for such a smuggler's adventure as the theory constructed in the Buried Alive Club called for. Every few minutes Lewis lifted the fluoroscope to his eyes and swept the horizon, west, north and east. He regretted that he had not brought another man along to keep a watch on Larpen on this crucial night. Captain Williams, however, detailed the head steward to report that passenger's movements, and before ten o'clock the steward reported Mr. Larpen in his stateroom, the door of which was being watched.

As the night wore on, Lewis felt more and more inclined to believe that the whole adventure was a wild-goose chase. At midnight he was convinced of it. Then he picked up his fluoroscope once more and again swept the horizon and the intervening spaces. A faint glow, as the chemicals with which the fluoroscent screen was coated responded by their activities to the influence of unseen rays, rewarded his patience. He passed the instrument to Captain Williams, who confirmed his observation. Greatly interested, the Captain took out his night glasses and tried in vain to pick up, with the unaided lenses, the same light that he had seen through the fluoroscope.

"Tell Sparks to shoot this radio right away," said Lewis, taking a slip of paper from his pocket and handing it to the Captain.

In a few minutes a sailor came to the bridge with a reply.

"I'll have to go into the cabin to decode this," said Lewis. "If any more come, let them be brought right to me."

Decoded, the message from the *Seneca* read thus:

"We have picked up the light also. We are about four miles south of you, steaming a parallel course without lights. Keep a careful watch for anything going overboard and notify us at once."

The message was signed by Jeff Waters and Stanley Miller.

RETURNING to the bridge, Lewis took the fluoroscope from Captain Williams.

"That light seems to be getting nearer," remarked the Captain as he handed over the instrument.

Lewis quickly confirmed this. He re-

ported the contents of the message from the *Seneca* to the Captain, who sent the second officer to post men along the rail and at the stern of the ship to watch carefully for anything that might be thrown overboard in the course of the next hour. Then, with his night glass, he tried to make out the *Seneca* in the position where she reported herself. Not a sign could he see of the revenue cutter.

"Let me take that contraption of yours and see if I can pick them up with that," suggested the Captain to Lewis, jocosely.

To the surprise of both of the men, the fluoroscope screen became illuminated when it was turned to the south.

"They must have the same kind of crazy light on the *Seneca,*" said Captain Williams.

At that moment the second officer approached the bridge.

"Something went overboard with a splash, out of the porthole of one of the cabins on the starboard side. It wasn't Mr. Larpen's cabin, sir. We don't know exactly which one it was, but it was aft of that."

Lewis dashed into the radio cabin and handed the operator another code message, prepared in advance, to be sent to the *Seneca*. Then, accompanied by Captain Williams, who left the bridge in charge of the second officer, he hurried to the taffrail.

"Whatever happens now will be well astern of us," he said.

Nothing was to be seen but the foamy wake of the *Cambodia*. For an instant, as the two men looked, they thought they saw a light flashing among the waves directly astern. Again and a third time it seemed to flash. Then all was darkness.

A steward came up to them.

"Radio message for Mr. Lewis," he said, handing a paper to the Treasury man.

"Everything working out according to plan," the message ran. "If you do not hear further from us before reaching port, hold all passengers on board ship until you do. We are heading north and can't tell when we shall make a landing."

"I wish we knew the rest of what is going on," said Lewis. "I suppose we will get it all soon enough, however. In the meantime, I think I'll turn in."

TOM SHEEHAN came down on the revenue cutter and climbed aboard as the *Cambodia* reached Boston Quarantine.

"I've got a warrant here for the arrest of Larpen," he said as he joined Evans and Captain Williams on the bridge. "I've also got a John Doe warrant for his accomplice on the ship. Let's see the diagram of the staterooms and the passenger list, and find out who occupies the second room aft from that of Larpen. We've made a complete round-up on shore, and with these two birds we'll have everything tied up tight."

The occupant of the stateroom in question proved to be a man who appeared on the passenger list under a polysyllabic and unpronounceable Greek name.

"He's just a tool, and probably all we can ever do to him is deport him," said Tom Sheehan. "I managed to screw a confession out of one of the gang, and he says Larpen has a different man to help him each trip. He pays the fellow's passage to the United States and gives him a bonus to carry the stuff in his cabin luggage and drop it overboard on signal."

"But how could Larpen give a signal to a man two staterooms away from him, when he is in his own stateroom with the door closed all night?" asked Captain Williams.

"I've got a line on that too," replied Tom Sheehan. "Let's fix these birds and then have a look-see."

Investigation disclosed a tiny hole bored through the partition between the stateroom occupied by Larpen and the adjoining one. A similar hole passed through the partition between that room and the next.

"A wire run through these two holes would be concealed under the lower berth in the intervening stateroom, and by pulling on the wire Larpen could convey signals to the Greek," Sheehan explained. "He would watch for the lights of the yacht and when he saw them would signal the Greek to get ready. To let the people on the yacht know that Larpen had picked up their ultra-violet signal light with his fluoroscope, he and the Greek would alternately turn on their stateroom lights and turn them off again. The successive illumination and darkening of two portholes would be noticeable at a considerable distance. They had some way of signaling back to him with their ultra-violet light that they were standing by, and then he would give the Greek a signal to chuck the stuff out of the porthole. They had it done up in links like a big sausage, fastened together in a long chain, and every

other link was an inflated rubber bag to keep it afloat," explained Sheehan.

"But how on earth could they fix it up so they could find it, floating in the ocean at night?" asked Lewis.

"That's where Davis' scientific dope comes in," replied Sheehan. "Let's get him to explain it the first chance we can. All I know is that it worked. We've got Dr. Rockwood-Prentiss, and if I'm not mistaken, we have busted up the dope-smuggling conspiracy."

A FEW evenings later the same group, with the exception of Jeff Waters, who was off on an iceberg hunt or something like that, was again seated around a table in the Buried Alive Club.

"I didn't see any practical way whereby one could show an ultra-violet signal from something dropped overboard," said Paul Davis. "It was obvious, however, that they could easily carry the ultra-violet light on a ship and that they might use a filter or screen over a searchlight that would shut off everything but the ultra-violet ray, while permitting that to penetrate to a great distance.

"During the war we did a good deal of experimenting at the Bureau with methods of detecting secret writings. One of the most successful of these was the use of the ultra-violet lights. There are a number of chemical substances which become fluorescent—that is, they give off light—when excited by the ultra-violet ray, although under all other lights they are perfectly invisible. Some substances glow with great intensity under very slight excitation by ultra-violet rays. These are well known to chemists and physicists.

"It occurred to me that it might be possible to paint a floating object with a coating of one of these chemical substances and pick it up by means of an ultra-violet searchlight at a distance of half a mile or more. So we rigged up an apparatus on the *Seneca* for producing ultra-violet rays, and I painted up a few cork buoys with different chemicals for an experiment. The experiment was so successful that it carried out fully the possibility of that being the method used by the dope-smugglers."

"They didn't suspect we were anywhere near them until we were right on top of them, and it was too late for them to throw the stuff overboard again," said Miller. "We had to guess which way they were heading, but we had a pretty good guess, as Cottrell had worked out for us the most likely passage between the islands if, as we suspected, their objective was Dr. Rockwood-Prentiss' private harbor. We followed that course until it began to get light, and then overhauled them. I went aboard of the *Atlantis*—that's the Doctor's yacht—with a couple of Coast Guard officers from the *Seneca*, and they made the pilot of the yacht take her in just as if nothing had happened. Dr. Rockwood-Prentiss walked right into our arms when he came down to the pier to meet the yacht."

"Score one more for the Buried Alive Club," said Tom Sheehan. "Miller, did anyone tell you that we elected you to membership here last night?"

"The Sands of Oro"

THAT fascinating strange land Papua is the scene of "The Sands of Oro," one of the most engaging novels this or any other magazine ever printed. The author, Beatrice Grimshaw, is a power in Papua—has lived there many years and has taken an important part in its development. Her stories are authentic—have the clear ring of truth. They are, moreover, concerned with conspicuously interesting people, are rapid in action, picturesque in detail. And "The Sands of Oro" is distinctly the best she has thus far written. Watch for it in the next—the November—issue of *The Blue Book Magazine*.

The Roof Bungalow

We have here the story of the wild, wild night enjoyed by an adventurous young man who undertook to assist a lady in distress, but found himself in pressing and complicated difficulties.

By HAROLD H. ARMSTRONG

A LADY in distress?

His pulse quickened a little. He had crossed Park Avenue in the lambent brilliance of the waning spring moon, walked directly in front of an apparently deserted sedan drawn up at the east curb, then plunged into the deep shadow cast clear across the side-street by the stone apartment building that towered magnificently on the corner. It was while passing the entrance, a few yards farther on, that his eyes, still dazzled by the moonlight, had betrayed him into imagining he saw the faint outlines of a woman crouched on the stone steps.

"You poor sap!" Orrington now scoffed at his own credulity. "Things like that don't happen any more. I tell you, it's quite imposs."

Nevertheless he chanced a second glance. No light glowed from the lobby to befriend his scrutiny; but by now his eyes had somewhat adjusted themselves to the darkness, and he was able to perceive the faint but unmistakable movement of something on the steps.

"Jove!" muttered Orrington, and stopped short. Then in the profound early-morning silence, he detected the distinct sound of stifled sobbing.

At twenty-four, one does not hesitate.

"Excuse me," he said. "Can't I—that is, isn't there something I could do?"

Startled rigidity, then swift scrutiny. Now, the lady in distress might have been twice as old as Orrington, and ugly, at that—*only she wasn't!* His eyesight, improving wondrously each instant, corroborated his intuition that she was young and slender, with fine hair piquantly bobbed—with alluring ankles and silver dancing-slippers escaping the warm protection of her fur coat.

She shook her head with vexation. "And I've lost my handkerchief too."

"But I say—wont you take mine?"

Orrington's manner was faultless. She accepted the proffer, brushed the tears from forlorn eyes, then spoke abruptly:

"I saw you dancing at the Plaza?"

He nodded. "My name is Gates—Orrington Gates." She did not seem disposed

to reveal her own identity, and he went on: "Wont you tell me what the trouble is?"

"Locked out! Can you imagine anything so dumb? Forgot my key, and forgot I'd forgotten till I'd let my escort go."

The slight catch in her voice, the woebegone appeal of her eyes, appointed him her champion forthwith. All he knew was that somehow, no matter what the cost, that poignant unhappiness of hers must be assuaged. And by him!

"Look here—I'm going to open that door for you, even if I have to use dynamite," he promised gallantly. "You've tried ringing the bell, of course?"

"Oh—just hours! Out of order, it must be—or else the night janitor's dead to the world."

A MOMENT more he stood staring at the wrought-iron grille doors that barricaded the entrance. Abstractedly he tried the immovable knob. Suddenly she was beside him, peering through the gratings into the dark lobby; and now he could make even more certain of her delicate and slightly sophisticated loveliness.

Orrington reverted to other expedients.

"If you'd rather, I can call a taxi and take you to one of your friends' houses."

"What time is it exactly, please?"

"A bit after three."

"Too late," she sighed disconsolately. "No, there's nothing to do but wait here till morning. Father will be simply furious, of course. . . . . Thank you so much for stopping, though."

"But I say!" He ignored the tentative dismissal. "You can't stay out here another three or four hours. Not safe. And besides, it would look—"

"Not very pretty."

"Why,"—he stammered a little,—"suppose a policeman came along. Suppose he took it into his head to arrest you as a suspicious character. One of these fashionable women crooks, you know."

"Gorgeous!" she laughed. "If I were a lady burglar, d' you fancy I'd stay out here on the doorstep shivering? Rather not! I'd be in through a window."

"There's an idea." Orrington stepped to the sidewalk and stared up at the apartment building's stone façade. "I wonder if I couldn't climb up—"

"You're not the Human Fly, by any chance?"

"Unfortunately, no. How is it in the rear?"

"But you couldn't—" She caught her breath. "There's a perfectly good fire-escape back there, if you could ever get to it. You see, the courtyard's entirely shut in by other buildings." Another slight exclamation. "Still—"

Quickly she led the way to the corner and pointed down Park Avenue. "D' you see—they're excavating for a new building next door. There's just a chance you might get through that way somehow."

The lady in distress was out in the moonlight now. Between the folds of her coat, he glimpsed her gown shimmering palely green. An entrancing and magical figure, of a beauty touchingly, wistfully youthful.

Abruptly her eagerness died away. "But I mustn't let you. You—you might be terribly hurt, or—"

"No fear."

"Or be taken for a burglar yourself. Possibly be shot—"

"I'm on my way," said Orrington masterfully, contemplating all possible disasters as sweet boons for her sake. "You'll wait at the door?"

"Well, then,"—she nodded reluctantly,—"it's the top floor. Perhaps the kitchen window will be open. And—oh, please—don't wake Father if you can help it. I'd much rather he didn't know."

"He sha'n't, then."

The moonlight, catching the gossamer of her hair, seemed to spin a radiant nimbus about her head. She gave him her hand, consigning her fortunes into his care, consecrating him for his chivalrous mission.

"Good luck."

"Cheerio!"

TILL she had reached the entrance once more, he continued to watch her—then started briskly down Park Avenue. The sedan was still at the curb, he noted; only now he had the vague intimation of a second woman's figure ensconced within its dark interior. All his faculties, however, were concentrated on the odd adventure he had embarked upon, and he could spare no curiosity for irrelevant details.

Reaching the board fence that shut off the excavation from the sidewalk, he paused an instant. The broad avenue seemed completely deserted, save for that

one sedan. Dexterously he swung himself up over the fence and gazed down into the pit that yawned below.

"The first real fun I've had," he told himself, "since I left the flying corps."

Five minutes later he stood in the narrow enclosed courtyard behind the apartment building, the first lap of his journey already behind him. The excavation had proved unexpectedly shallow, and his greatest difficulty was to keep from slipping off a narrow plank path into the surrounding mud. Thence over a second fence—a solid concrete affair, this, and high, yet scarcely more than an easy vault to his avid muscles. And always the moon's bland luminance had facilitated his progress.

"Hot dog!" Orrington took time to congratulate himself. "It's a pipe." He gazed complacently up at the fire-escape which jutted out of the back of the apartment building like a protuberant spinal column.

Straightway more serious obstacles threatened. For the fire-escape came no lower than the building's second story—ceased abruptly a dozen feet from the ground. One descending the contrivance was evidently expected to drop to the cement areaway as best he could.

By the greatest of good fortune, however, there was a barrel standing on end directly underneath the fire-escape—almost as if some one else had been endeavoring to reach it. Yet when Orrington had mounted the barrel, the feat seemed wholly impossible, so great was the distance intervening between his outstretched fingers and the lowest section of the steel structure above.

Perplexed, he surveyed the rear wall. There seemed absolutely no foothold to enable him to climb up that way. Once more he mounted the barrel and measured the interval anew.

"Let's go!"

A prodigious upward leap, and one hand closed over rusty metal. Then to his consternation, a whole section of the fire-escape seemed to wrench loose and descended with him to the ground with a clanking *ka-chunk, ka-chunk;* and he perceived too late that what he had caught hold of was a kind of drawbridge or swinging ladder, attached to heavy weights—a contrivance that permitted one to descend in safety from above, yet rendered the fire-escape inaccessible to marauders.

Not a little startled by this unexpected occurrence,—and more specially by the dismal *ka-chunk, ka-chunk* that still seemed to reëcho through the inclosed courtyard,—he did not venture to move again for several moments. Then, as soon as it appeared certain that no one had been aroused by the noise, he stole gingerly up the drawbridge, taking great pains to let the unwieldy device up after him without further creaking.

"Great hat!" he muttered. "If a chap didn't watch his step going down that thing, he'd get pitched out on his head."

AT last the top floor. But—only one window gave upon the fire-escape, and this he found locked.

Thwarted, he glanced about him, and then noted for the first time that the fire-escape continued on upward. To the roof, doubtless; yet when he had climbed a few more steps, he discovered what was apparently an additional story, peculiarly set back a few feet from the building's edge. And when he had aspired to the topmost rung, the moonlight revealed to his jubilant eyes a window that was not merely unlocked, but already open from the bottom a full two feet.

Never before, even when flying, had he felt so exhilarated, so alive. From where he stood, he could command the courtyard below, and the excavation pit, even Park Avenue. How surprised and thrilled that enchanting girl would be! Perhaps she would even let him call sometime. For certainly no chivalrous knight had ever rescued fair lady in distress more intrepidly—or more swiftly. Less than ten minutes had elapsed since he left her; and now, by the grace of astounding good luck and his own agile courage, his exploit was as good as achieved.

"The rest will be soft," he reflected, projecting one foot through the window. "Must be careful not to wake up Father—but if anybody does nab me, I can easily prove my innocence."

Yes, the room in which he now found himself was the kitchen, just as the girl had said. Once more the friendly moon abetted him.

And this, the pantry.

Orrington stopped abruptly, for the swinging door just ahead of him was faintly rimmed with light. Then, with the utmost caution, he gently pushed the door ajar and beheld a surprising scene.

Seated at the dining table, quite alone, was an elderly gentleman wearing a dressing gown and a skull-cap. His sage and benevolent profile was distinctly visible from the swinging door, and Orrington observed that he was eating from a porridge bowl on the table.

The girl's father, beyond doubt. Orrington, in fact, was ready to imagine a certain resemblance between the two.

"Needn't worry about waking him up, anyhow."

He retreated to the kitchen, resolved at any cost to carry through the enterprise without disturbing the elderly gentleman.

"But my word—what if that's the only way of getting through to the front of the apartment?" he chafed.

THERE was but one other door in the kitchen, and this, he discovered, led only to a small storage closet. Then, just as he was noiselessly closing it again, the lights flashed on, and he found himself facing the elderly gentleman.

"Well, young man, what can I do for you?"

The elderly gentleman's voice disclosed neither indignation nor the slightest fear.

It was Orrington who found difficulty in speaking.

"Why, you're Mr. Webster, of the Fifth National Bank," he identified all at once.

"Yes!"—very courteously.

"You don't know me, but for months and months I've been trying to get into your private office to sell you some bonds. But your secretary wont let me through."

The elderly gentleman smiled. "And not having had any success with my secretary, you decided to approach me directly, in my home. Most enterprising of you."

Orrington felt extraordinarily foolish all at once; his whole exploit, in fact, ceased to seem heroic, and instead became grotesque and almost impossible of explanation.

"You see—your daughter," he faltered. "She's waiting for me down at the front entrance. Locked out—lost her key—bell out of order."

"Well, well!" The humor of the narrative did not escape his host. Then, recalling his mission to the kitchen, he opened the icebox and drew out a bottle of milk. "Do come in and sit down a moment." He gestured toward the dining-room.

Once there, he refilled his porridge bowl and broke fresh crackers into it.

"Wont you join me?" He produced a second bowl, and pointed to a chair.

Orrington disliked above all things to appear rude. "But don't you think—"

"No," misinterpreted the elderly gentleman, adjusting his skull-cap more securely, "you'll find crackers and milk a most nutritious diet. Not at all harmful. I often have this sort of a snack in the middle of the night."

"Awfully kind of you, but don't you think we'd better let your daughter in first? A bit chilly outdoors."

"My daughter? Oh, yes!"

His quizzical inflection disturbed Orrington. "Look here—there's no mistake, is there? You have a daughter, haven't you?"

"To be sure, to be sure." The elderly gentleman seemed exceedingly diverted, somehow. "Well, suppose you sit right here while I let her in. I perhaps am more familiar with the location of things." He moved toward the corridor. "But in the meantime, do help yourself to the crackers and milk."

A regular prince! "Imagine his not batting an eye when he caught me," quoth Orrington to himself. "Some nerve, I'll say! And then inviting me in here to eat with him!"

A peculiar notion of hospitality, at that. Orrington wouldn't think of touching a single cracker, at least until his host's daughter appeared.

SEVERAL minutes elapsed. The elderly gentleman must have been obliged to walk all the way downstairs to open the door. Orrington, uneasy, approached the corridor to investigate.

In the dark passageway he descried a figure.

"Oh, there you are!"

But the figure, abruptly wheeling, revealed a wholly unfamiliar visage—the scowling and unamiable face of a young person, clad, like Orrington, in a dinner jacket, and bearing in his hand a black cloth bag.

"Hell!" said this newcomer explicitly, and promptly covered Orrington with a revolver.

"I beg your pardon—"

"I oughta bump you for butting into my territory." Instead, he divested Orrington of his watch and pocketbook with

amazing celerity. "Next time, maybe, you'll stick to your own beat!"

At this instant, there came the unmistakable sound of footsteps down the corridor, and the impolite newcomer vanished through the swinging door into the kitchen, like a ghost.

It percolated through Orrington's dazed faculties that the elderly gentleman had at last arrived with his daughter; and he rushed into the corridor a second time to warn them of the burglary.

Instantly he found himself struggling with some one in the dark.

The elderly gentleman's placid voice broke in:

"Don't shoot him!"

Next—a crushing impact upon the back of his head.

AFTER an interval, he realized he was sitting in one of the dining-room chairs, his hands and feet manacled with heavy twine.

"That's better," said the elderly gentleman, bending toward him solicitously. "Please accept my regrets, young man, for our rough treatment of a most diverting guest. On the other hand, you can't fairly deny I gave you every opportunity to get away."

"But you've made a mistake!" Orrington blinked at the two new figures in the room, extremely muscular-looking in their pajamas—evidently servants. "I'm no burglar."

"Possibly not—yet my bungalow appears to have been robbed by somebody."

"Yes, of course—by that other chap. He robbed me too, just now, right in this room."

His captors smiled indulgently.

"Tell that to the police," suggested one of the florid-faced servants.

"Listen!" There came to Orrington's ears a rapid *ka-chunk, ka-chunk.* "There he goes now!"

Silence and further skeptical smiles.

"I heard nothing."

"But see here!" Orrington cried indignantly. His head had begun to ache badly, and the situation was becoming quite too preposterous. "Go downstairs and get your daughter. She'll explain how I happen to be here."

The elderly gentleman shook his head. "Unfortunately," he observed dryly, "my daughter happens to be wintering in the Riviera."

THE police sergeant was in an exultant mood when he arrived.

"Congratulations, Mr. Webster! You've landed one of the slickest crooks in the country. And we got the woman, too."

"The woman?" Already the elderly gentleman was at his crackers and milk again.

"Sure—the accomplice, the decoy. Waitin' outside, she was, an' when she seen us comin', she started to make her sneak, but we nabbed her."

The captive gulped. "Is she still downstairs?"

"Not a chance, buddy. Halfway to the station by this time."

Till now Orrington had not been particularly abashed by the weird casualties that had befallen him. Nothing more serious than an absurd misunderstanding that was bound to clear itself. But—that entrancing princess of his carted roughly away to a police station! Of course they'd release her as soon as they found out who she was; yet what a frightful mess!

"Much better if I hadn't tried to help her," he groaned. "The king of nitwits—that's me!"

The notoriety—her name in all the papers!

"But if she isn't Mr. Webster's daughter, who *is* she?" He remembered her face as he had last seen it, illumined in the magic moonlight. "Whoever she is," he resolved grimly, "they wont get a word out of me about her."

IT was not until the next morning that his own situation seemed at all grave. A friendly turnkey thrust the morning paper through the grating of his cell.

"Mebbe you'd enjoy readin' 'bout yourself."

Orrington didn't enjoy it particularly.

SOCIETY CROOKS NABBED IN PARK AVENUE BURGLARY

Discovered in the very act of robbing the roof bungalow of Ira Webster, the financier, two notorious crooks were bagged by the police, early this morning. The pair consisted of Harry Hoskowitz, alias Hunk Nelson, alias "Tuxedo Harry," and his woman companion, Sophie Brannagan, and it is alleged by the authorities that the two are the perpetrators of most of the burglaries in the fashionable district that have been baffling the police of late. . . . .

The detectives profess some doubt as to the identity of the gentleman burglar, but inasmuch as he was caught red-handed by Mr. Webster, the police are not worrying

about this phase of the situation. In the case of Sophie Brannagan, however, the identification is positive. She was released from Auburn prison less than six months ago, after serving a term for burglary. . . . .

When taken into custody, she was wearing an expensive fur coat, and a green party-gown that would have made most debutantes gasp with envy. . . . .

The pair will be arraigned in police court this morning.

"My word!" ejaculated Orrington, rubbing his lacerated scalp. "I must be dreaming. Why, it simply can't be true. That girl's no crook!"

Yet what, after all, did he know about her?

He had a very bad moment before the friendly turnkey unlocked the cell door and started him on his way to the police court.

Impossible—but there she was, sitting in the very first row of benches. He detected her the instant he was led into the courtroom. Instinctively he started toward her, but her slight gesture repelled him. She was smiling faintly, quizzically.

"I don't blame you for laughing at me, Miss Sophie Brannagan," Orrington reflected sourly. "You couldn't have picked an easier mark anywhere."

There was no moonlight in this evil-smelling courtroom to gloss over the grim reality that faced him; and his disillusion with life and with women was complete.

"Jove! What'll I do now?"

The actual truth about his adventure—his first encounter with the girl, that phantom-like burglar who had robbed him—sounded incredibly fishy, even to him.

A woman across the table was staring fixedly at him.

"Harry!" she suddenly greeted him. Then: "Are you badly hurt?"

Orrington consulted the attendant policeman. "Who's that woman? I don't know her."

"No, I s'pose not," grinned the officer. "Anyhow, her identification makes our case against you complete."

"But who *is* she?"

"Oh, I don't mind being kidded. That there's your old playmate, Sophie Brannagan."

"Sophie Bran—" gasped Orrington. The truth came over him slowly. "Why, she's pretending I'm Tuxedo Harry! She's trying to save that other fellow."

He was conscious, however, of keen happiness. The whole affair remained impenetrably shrouded in mystery; yet this one certainty came like a ray of light. Whoever and whatever that slender girl might be, she was not Sophie Brannagan.

"I knew it all the time," he assured himself.

HERE now was the elderly gentleman himself,—no longer in dressing-gown and skull cap,—taking the witness stand and relating with seeming reluctance how his early morning snack of crackers and milk had been rudely interrupted—relating further the prisoner's absurd explanation about the lady in distress awaiting him below. The courtroom relaxed into wide grins.

"Any questions?"

Orrington, who had abjured benefit of counsel, was about to shake his head. Then, suddenly:

"I should like to ask what became of the stolen property."

"Well," testified the witness, "that's something of a mystery. It was not in the prisoner's possession, and I must confess I have been unable to find it."

"But how could I have secreted it? What opportunity—"

"It just occurs to me," interrupted the elderly gentleman blandly, "that the kitchen window was open, and that you may have thrown your swag out on the fire-escape, or even down into the courtyard below."

The assistant district attorney was on his feet, addressing the police judge. "I suggest, Your Honor, that an officer be dispatched immediately to search the fire-escape and the courtyard, and then report to us at once what he discovers."

It was so ordered.

There followed the testimony of the two stalwart servants. Next the policeman's story of the capture of Sophie Brannagan. She it was who had sat concealed in the sedan, awaiting the return of Tuxedo Harry.

Neither prisoner offering any evidence, the judge spoke:

"In spite of the fact that the stolen property cannot be accounted for, I think a prima facie case has been made out. Both defendants, therefore, will be held—"

A tremulous voice intervened:

"If you please, sir—just a moment."

Orrington sprang up and confronted the girl.

"You stay out of this," he commanded. "There's no necessity—"

His lady in distress flashed her defiance. "Fifty-fifty!"

"Order, order!" called the judge, and Orrington found himself jerked back into his chair. "Young woman, if you have any testimony to give, please take the stand."

"My name is Vivia Chapin—"

Thought Orrington: "I know her name now, anyhow."

"And I live on the top floor of the apartment building where this burglary occurred."

"Wait, wait!" This from the magistrate. "I thought Mr. Webster lived on the top floor."

It was the elderly gentleman who explained. "The apartment occupied by Miss Chapin and her family *is* on the top floor, strictly speaking. My bungalow was built only a year or two ago, and I suppose, really, I live on the roof."

"Yes, that was the whole trouble," Miss Chapin confessed ruefully. "I told Mr. Gates that I lived on the top floor, and completely forgot to mention Mr. Webster's bungalow."

"Please proceed."

Orrington was on his feet again. "No, no," he pleaded. "It's no good—"

At this juncture there was a slight commotion at the door, and the police officer who had been dispatched to the scene of the crime reëntered, dragging behind him the somewhat limp figure of a young person in a soiled dinner jacket.

"Harry!" This time, there was no guile in Sophie Brannagan's frantic greeting.

"Found him in the courtyard, tryin' to hide behind a barrel," announced the officer with the pride of achievement. "Seems like the swinging ladder at the bottom of the fire-escape let him down quicker 'n he expected, an' he fell and busted one arm—so he couldn't climb the fence. An' here,"—the minion of the law raised aloft the black cloth bag,—"here is the swag!"

"And here"—Orrington pounced upon Tuxedo Harry with considerable zest—"is my watch, and unless I mistake greatly, my wallet."

FROM the limousine that awaited her, Miss Vivia Chapin extended a grateful hand in farewell.

"It was splendid of you to come and rescue me," Orrington professed with a slight break in his voice. And in truth, this moment of parting cost him more misery than his whole night in a cell. "By the way, what became of you last night, anyway?"

The lady in distress surveyed her knight's crisp blond hair with favor. "Well, I waited some time for you; then, just about the time the police arrived, our night janitor woke up and condescended to unlock the door. I thought I'd probably find you up in our apartment, and when you weren't there, I couldn't imagine what had happened to you—till I read about the burglary in Mr. Webster's bungalow and realized how stupid I'd been. Little enough for me to come to court and help you out of the mess I'd got you into. You must have spent a horrid night."

Orrington shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't mind that part of it; but now your name will be in the papers, and I'm rather afraid—"

She sighed. "And Father will find out, after all."

"Nonsense!" Unnoticed the elderly gentleman had approached. "I've already fixed that part. Neither of your names will appear in print."

"Hosanna!" Vivia held out her hand a second time. "You *will* come to see me?"

Orrington smiled ecstatically. "Well, rather!"

"Soon?"

"Tonight."

The limousine disappeared around a corner, leaving Orrington gazing rapturously after it.

"And young man—"

Orrington started. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Webster. I'd quite forgotten—"

"Naturally." The banker nodded sympathetically. "I merely wanted to tell you I'd be most happy to have you come up to the bungalow again—say this evening, after you've reluctantly left Miss Vivia."

"Well, rather!"

"I might even buy a bond from you. Bring along a prospectus."

"Delighted," said Orrington. "Leave the kitchen window open, and I'll be there."

The elderly gentleman shook hands benevolently. "Crackers and milk at midnight."

The Antelope Kriss

This fine tale of jungle adventure is one of a remarkable group brought back by the author of "Elephant Talk" and many other Blue Book stories, from a long visit to the East Indies.

By WARREN H. MILLER

"BUT it cawn't be genuine Battak, my dear fellow!" protested Kirkby, genially, pressing the button for another round of pegs. "Y'see—"

"But it *is!*" vociferated Severance, the Yank, heatedly. "I bought it in Medan, I tell you. It's a genuine Battak kriss; and there's more concerning it, too—"

"Not a hope!" interrupted Kirkby, the teak-magnate, puffing clouds of smoke from his cheroot. He grinned upon young Severance with a fatherly indulgence. "A kriss has a saw handle, y'see. Never knew of one that hadn't. I fawncy some blighter of an Afrikander got this one, in the way of trade, and put on that antelope horn."

"But the wavy blade," objected Severance. "That's Malayan, isn't it?"

Kirkby beamed: "Not exclusively. 'Pon my word, I'll lay a quid this whole thing is African. Antelope is almost exclusively an African genus—save for the pronghorn of your benighted West."

The attention of the three men around that cane table was diverted by the arrival of something cooling in glasses. A waiter entered the vast lobby of the hotel, bearing a tray of Scotch and sodas in which ice tinkled enticingly. All in white, crowned with a stunning scarlet turban and girt with a flowing scarlet sash, his bare feet pattered softly on the tile floor as he swept forward with the tray. It was a beastly hot night, in what Penang calls her "cool" season. Electric fans suspended from the dim roof of the court far overhead whirled ceaselessly. The soft voices of natives going and coming along the verandas, which rose tier on tier above the court and upon which the hot rooms of the hotel gave, mingled with the patter of their bare feet. The guffaws of Englishmen drinking about the wicker tables in the court resounded in jovial explosions, interrupted by the occasional whine of the lift as some guest was taken up to his rooms.

"Well—cheerio!" the word went around as the waiter pattered off with the empty tray.

THE third man was first to break an imbibing silence. It was Cochrane, the geodetic-survey man of the Straits Settlements. Elderly and florid, with a huge, craggy nose, his face tanned swarthy by his twenty years of life in the jungle, he grinned sardonically upon Kirkby as he set down his glass. The jungle had no fascinations for him now, but there were few of its secrets that he did not know.

"I'll take your bet, Kirkby," he purred softly. "The kriss is a genuine Battak. Our young camphor-planting friend, here, has a rare treasure."

"Really?" returned Kirkby, not at all convinced. He applied himself to his glass.

Severance picked up the kriss and examined it now with a new interest. It was about a foot and a half long, with the typical stout blade of wavy-edged steel for which the Malays are famous, but its peculiar interest lay in its handle of curved antelope horn, black, deeply ribbed and tapering to a long, hooked point.

Kirkby sat gathering ammunition to reply to such a redoubtable antagonist as was Cochrane, the Authority.

"But Cochrane, how do you account for the handle, then?" he came back at length. "I'd stake my life it's the horn of a Grant's gazelle, an African antelope species. And no Malay in his senses would *put* such a handle on a kriss. I have you there, now, haven't I?" he wheedled with the genial cheerfulness of the successful Englishman of affairs of the tropics.

Cochrane smiled gently. "Most Malays *aren't* in their senses, y'know—particularly the Battaks. Some of them are cannibals yet. The Dutch aren't finished with them in Sumatra by a long shot."

"But that doesn't answer me," persisted Kirkby. He squared around and faced Cochrane with all the earnestness which an Englishman can pump up over matters of natural science or of the ethnology of the various native tribes under British rule. "How can you account for an African antelope horn on a Malay kriss? Tell me that! Isn't anything but a saw-handle grip totally beyond the conception of a Malay swordsmith? There, now! There! *Habet!*"

KIRKBY fairly chortled with satisfaction. His round, determined face, blazing with sunburn and the prodigious heat, shone with a good-humored consciousness of victory. Your Englishman doesn't lose his temper over an argument, any more than he forgets to don his dinner jacket for his evening meal, no matter if only in a tent and in some far and forgotten jungle of his vast empire.

Severance looked upon the two with amusement and not a little love and esteem. The male of our human species never appears better than when in smart black dinner jacket and spotless white shirt, and the Eastern version of it, the same jacket, only in stunning white, sets off your gentleman of the tropics to even better advantage. Those two friends of his were typical of their race, Kirkby operating big teak holdings somewhere up in the Shan Hills of Burma, Cochrane spending his life in surveying and mapping the untracked jungles of Malaya, which later generations might develop—both of them outdoors men, iron-hard, robust knowing better how to live than their counterparts from any other nation. We Americans are the nearest to them; but your American works too hard and worries too much to succeed in the tropics, and your Frenchman works not hard enough. Severance himself was interested in camphor, and was growing thin and peaked because of it, for he took *Dryobalanops Gaertn,* and particularly Sumatra camphor, too seriously. He needed that poise and satisfaction with life and everything in it that was so characteristic of his English friends, to steady him.

"But it's *not* an African antelope horn, y'see," returned Cochrane. "It's a Sumatran species, *Antilopus Sumatrensis*—very rare. So rare that even back in '75 the few survivors had been driven far back into the hills," he explained cheerily.

"Thanks, Cochrane!" grinned Severance, sardonically. "And now, you chaps —Kirkby being eliminated—let me tell you something really interesting about this kriss. It's a message for you, Cochrane. From Sumatra—two days old. I bought it from a wizened old sinner of a Malay who kept hanging around the Oranje Hotel in Medan, looking wistfully at every white man who came and went. You know the lot—Dutch tobacco men, Portuguese half-caste lawyers, Germans looking for concessions, seldom an Englishman there now, since the War.

"'You Inggris, Tuan?' he asked me when I hunted him up, intending to buy the odd kriss that I had noticed in his girdle.

" 'Yes, I'm English, in a way,' said I. 'What's that to you?'

" 'You know the Tuan Cochrane?' he asks me.

" 'Yes; how much for that kriss, old fellow?' I asked, wondering a bit that he should know you.

"I swear, that old sinner actually went down on his knees and clasped my puttees! 'Tuan! Tuan—Inggris Tuan! Only let the Presence promise to show this kriss to the Tuan Cochrane, and I sell—gladly!' he mumbles."

"My word!" ejaculated Kirkby. "Odd, that—rather!"

COCHRANE silently put out his hand for the kriss. He ran his eye minutely along its wavy blade, rubbed with his thumb-nail on the dark brown scum that smeared the bright steel along its convex sides.

"It's Ali Kassim's kriss, men!" he announced after a pause. "It looked familiar, but of course there are not a few of these antelope krisses in central Sumatra. They are ceremonial weapons, not much used in war. A symbol of fealty, presented to the reigning rajah by the tribal chiefs. I declare, y'know—this kriss would be the very last thing I could imagine Ali parting with under any circumstances! Has been in his family for generations, y'know, and—that's dried blood on its blade!"

"Really?" said Kirkby. "And who and what may this Ali be, old chap?" he demanded.

"He shared my rice—once," said Cochrane reminiscently. "A strong friendship. We jungle men often have them with the natives, when you run across a good sort. Perils, no end, shared together. Starvation, jungle fever, cholera. Friendship, strong as death. Five years of it, down unknown jungle rivers on bamboo rafts, in native broils—he saved my life once, when stalked by a tiger, alone and unarmed. For my sake Ali tackled the brute with nothing but his spear and this kriss. Ever see a native throw one? Goes straight as a die. Ali had cast his spear, only to bring Stripes at him in a roaring fury. Ali shot the kriss into his open mouth. Severed the spinal nerve and settled that tiger for good. An ungodly mouthful, that! We took it out of his clenched teeth when his flurries had died down. The hilt was bent double, and Stripes' big canines had actually nicked that fine tough steel. Here's the nick—Ali never *could* grind it entirely out."

Cochrane showed them a faint hollow in the edge about two inches from the hilt. The prongs of it had been straightened, too.

"Then a girl called Ali, and he went back to his Sumatran village, Kota Pasir, up near the volcano Sorek Berapi in the Battak country. He is a prince of the house of Menangkabau; but his uncle, that old scoundrel Mulei Suib, is rajah of the Five Kotas up there. . . . . You chaps—there is warm calamity in the message of this kriss!"

"But, my dear fellow, you're not dropping your affairs and going over there about it, are you?" protested Kirkby. "We need you at that rubber conference tomorrow, y'know."

Severance looked on the pondering Cochrane with a light of Yankee idealism shining in his eyes. "If you *do* go, old chap, count me in, will you?" he exclaimed. "This business interests me. Friendship! Never go back on an old friend! I'd like to meet this Ali of yours, too."

"Right-o! Kirkby—tell 'em to wait. Put off the bally conference somehow, cawn't you? Friendship admits no expedients. This kriss says Ali's in trouble. He shared my rice, once—"

" 'Pon my word, y'know!" exploded Kirkby. "But it's quite all right, y'know. Our duty to our natives and all that. . . . . They'll understand, old chap."

"Tomorrow's Maatschappij boat to Belawan Deli, eh?" queried Severance eagerly.

"Quite so. I'll keep the kriss, for the present, Severance, if you don't mind. Well—cheerio!"

The three finished their glasses and went up to their rooms for the night.

A QUEER little Dutch tropical town is Medan. You reach it by train from the hot and sweltering harbor of Belawan Deli. The canals; the *aloon,* bordered with great green *waringen* trees; the fort; many handsome and modern buildings erected by the wealthy planter element; the De Witte Club; the Residency; Chinese temples; native bazaars; busy train-sheds loading tobacco leaf, rubber, rattan, camphor, ebony, coffee, tea—and you've seen Medan. A car stood in front of the veranda of the Oranje Hotel—a good

American car, by the way—the Hindoo chauffeur obsequiously helping in two white sahibs and grimacing under a sneering black mustache, as, all unbidden by him, a bent old Malay crept with trembling limbs through the rear tonneau door and squatted on the floor, not presuming to occupy the seat until bidden by his white overlords.

"Kota Pasir," pronounced the taller and older of the whites as he settled himself in the tonneau. "A hundred florins if you make it without a breakdown."

"Going, sar!" wailed the Hindoo in his high-pitched, singsong voice. He started the machine, and the car swept out of Medan's dusty streets and up the road into the highlands.

Tobacco, tobacco everywhere! Vast fields of lalang grass lying fallow, with here and there a *tulang* or bee tree, left by the fellers of the jungle. Great roofs of curing sheds, camps of Chinese coolies —fields brown and stippled in green with young tobacco plants just set out. Over to the west rose the dim blue ranges of the Barisans, with here and there the black or yellow cone of a volcano, some of them, like Sulphur Mountain, with a plume of smoke around their summits and a ceaseless outflow of tufa rolling endlessly down their flanks. Imperceptibly the car climbed higher and higher into the mountains. Green jungle, streaked with white teak-trunks, filled the valleys and clothed the mountain flanks. The tobacco plantations disappeared. They passed the last spur of the railroad at Arnhemia, and the car turned south for Lake Toba. Native villages in their groves of coco-palms; *passangrahans* at twelve-mile intervals, corresponding to the dak-bungalows or rest-houses of India and Burma and the Straits; jumbles of queer, horned-roof houses, with outleaning walls of teak; elaborately decorated rice-barns in white painted teak, with enormous horned roofs and inlaid with tin, shining bits of glass, mirrors, shells; natives in sarong and kerchief, the women holding their *slendangs* across their faces with pious Mohammedan modesty as the car swept by.

AFTER a time the vast shining waters of Lake Toba appeared. They were speeding along its eastern shore on a smooth government road which kept to a high shelf above the lake. This was the country of the Battaks, Mohammedans of a peculiar sort, who have been until recently the most pious of cannibals, eating their own old people with solemn religious rites.

Cochrane made inquiries and presently stopped the car at a word from the old Malay, and they all got out. He sent the Hindoo back to the last *passangrahan* with orders to wait. Back into the jungle, along a path which led to a pleasant grove of jack-fruit trees, the old Malay led them. Severance noted a huge pale-green scorpion orchid growing up the trunk of one of those trees, and he examined it carefully for tree snakes before seating himself with his back against its trunk. Syrupy calls of minah thrushes sounded through the glade as Cochrane also sat down; otherwise all was silence in the sunny peace of the monsoon breeze.

"Now tell us, Sora," he urged the elderly Malay.

The latter squatted, listening carefully into the jungle for any sound or sign of man. He took a sirih leaf from his box, added a smear of lime and a bit of betel nut, and folded the quid for transference to his mouth.

"Thy servant, Tuan, is the *muntri*" (vizier) "of the young prince Ali," he began. "Many generations have I and mine served his family, for he is noble, Tuan, of the ancient stock of the Menang-kabau. *Ya Allah, Tuan,* it is evil to grow old; yet when one advises the youth of such a stock —" Sora waved a thin arm as if to signify that such loyalty was the one consolation of his age.

"Listen, then, Tuan, to our woes!" he went on. "This Rajah Mulei Suib—may Allah blight his liver utterly!—is even such an one as the Evil One cherisheth. I take refuge in God! Is it not a sin that such an one, blood relative of the prince Ali, should plot upon his life? Know, then, that after the fast of the Rhamadan, it is customary for all the chiefs of the Five Kotas to attend upon the rajah, presenting to his finger-tips the kriss of fealty, even such a kriss as this one." Sora patted the Antelope Kriss, which he now wore again in his girdle.

"It is very ancient, Tuan. See the horn of the sacred antelope which is its handle. It is very, very old. Many times has it slain, when He-of-the-Hairy-Face, our lord of the jungle" (the tiger) "came forth upon spears held in the hands of men. Thou knowest, Tuan!"

"Ai! That do I!" said Cochrane. "Even for that reason am I here, O wise *muntri* . . . . The Tuan listens."

"Know, then, that when, this season, the kriss was presented by Prince Ali, that wily and accursed rajah did pretend to put upon himself the face of wrath. '*Hai*—wanton and faithless nephew of mine!' he shouted upon Ali in a loud voice and refusing to touch his kriss of fealty. 'Know I not well the tale of tribute that you have withheld from me! Liar and hypocrite that thou art, may Allah blast thee utterly!' Ai, that a son of the Menangkabau should be so set upon by an evil dog! He that the records show should rightly be rajah in the rooms of this swine! I saw that Ali's liver waxed hot within him as he arose; and I, as his old *muntri*, hastened to interpose between them with soft words. But in vain.

" 'Debt-slave art thou henceforth to me, O Ali Hassim, thou and thy wife and thy children, thy father and thy mother!' *Hai*, but that was the doom of the Rajah Suib! . . . . I take refuge in God, was ever disgrace so put upon an innocent man! Thou knowest the prince Ali, Tuan—think you that he would withhold aught of the *kota* tribute that was rightfully the rajah's?"

"The wily old devil!" ejaculated Cochrane. "What then, O *muntri?*" he asked, adopting the Malay form of speech, since the conversation was being carried on in that language.

"Thou knowest, Tuan, that loyalty to the reigning rajah is the life of the Sumatran *kotas*. Without it we lose face before the *Orang Blanda,*" (the Dutch), "whose soldiers come and punish all alike if there is strife between us. My prince would fain shield his people from such calamity; therefore did he answer the rajah with dignity, in which I too added my voice; and we twain endeavored to depart, not in anger but in sorrow, abiding by the Rajah to prove his words concerning our tribute. Then it was that those of the Rajah's bodyguard were bidden to stop us. Then krisses flashed and spears flew! *Ya Allah!* We twain against the multitude!

"The kriss of fealty was forced to strike at its own people then, Tuan; and my prince Ali, weeping bitterly that it should be so, made his escape to his own village. At the hour when the kine go down to water, we arrived there; and at our story, our people would fain have risen in war against this false and perfidious rajah. But Ali would have none of it, in that much people would be slain and the Kumpanie's soldiers come upon all of us alike. So he took his wife and his little ones and fled into the jungle, while I, taking the kriss that thou knowest, old and sorrowing that I am, went forth into the world of white men, seeking thee in our trouble."

"Hm!" said Cochrane, tugging at his white mustache. "Where is Ali now?"

"Of a truth I know not, Tuan. But I will essay a signal. This grove was to be our trysting-place, should I ever find you."

SORA raised himself on his skinny old legs and faced the sweeping slopes of jungle which covered the mountain-side in an impenetrable tangle. A few preliminary *"Eee's"* came from him as he adjusted the roof of his mouth and his lips to just the right pitch; then, loud and resonant, came that astounding *"Eee—Whoop! Whoop! Whoop!"* of the Sumatran gibbon. A man can imitate it perfectly. It is not an articulate word of voice, but rather the projection of the whole breath of the lungs through the larynx against the bone of the roof of the mouth. The resulting sound is a prodigious whoop, louder and more penetrating than any shout whatever of the normal voice. What is more, it can be repeated again and again without effort so long as a lungful of breath holds out. Once having mastered the trick, one no longer wonders how the gibbons of Burma and Malaya can make such an astonishing and continuous noise.

After a time a distant series of whoops answered them from somewhere high up on the mountain slopes. Sora cocked his ear and listened critically.

"Often, Tuan, do the monkeys themselves answer that call. But they, being but brutes without reason, continue to whoop until all the jungle resounds with their voice. Also, it is only at the hour when the fowls leave their perches that they do usually call. If this is not repeated, it may well be Prince Ali himself. We will wait."

He squatted patiently on his hams again, spitting the red betel-juice as he waited. Severance turned somewhat uneasily to Cochrane:

"Now that you have found your friend, what are you going to *do?*" he asked. "Aren't we getting in rather deep, med-

dling in on a native matter of this kind, Cochrane?"

"My dear fellow!" beamed Cochrane. "Not a bit of it, y'know! It's rather topping, isn't it? Here's this rajah swine, cooking up we know not what rascality, and here's my old friend Prince Ali Kassim, of the ancient stock of the Menangkabau, chased off into the jungle with a price on his head on a trumped-up charge—really, we shall have to see it through for him, y'know!"

Severance laughed and shrugged his shoulders. The nerve of the tropical Englishman! To go alone into a stronghold of Malay tribesmen, and by the simple justice of his words and the might of the Empire that stands back of him, to enforce his will—when a mere stab of a kriss, the thrust of a spear, is all that is needed to puncture his audacious assumption of authority, to stop his mouth with dust forever. Yet they all did it—Sir Hugh Clifford in Pahang, Sir Frank Swettenham in Perak, Sir James Brooke in Borneo—the story of their lives is filled with just such incidents. Pity, it is, that moves them all. To stand by and do nothing amid scenes of barbarous and unrestrained Malay tyranny, it was the obligation of the white man's conscience that made such a course abhorrent to them, that made them cheerfully risk their lives in matters that were no personal concern of theirs at all—their duty to the Brown Race. Cochrane, Severance perceived, was running true to form.

A call of some unfamiliar bird rang through the forest. Old Sora answered it guardedly; and presently there walked into the glade the young Battak chieftain. Severance studied him curiously, for this was his first sight of that curious tribe, half Malay, half aborigine, which inhabits central Sumatra, and whose weaving has become so famous that the name *batik,* given to their peculiar wax dyeing process, has gone around the world. A pleasant face, Ali's—beautiful in the delicate Malay type of beauty: finely penciled eyebrows, large brown almond eyes, a nose singularly fine in its modeling. Only the mouth betrayed a certain coarseness, but, Severance imagined, it would be easy to picture this fellow, if clad in European clothes and walking the streets of London, as being received on the same footing in English society as the familiar Chinese or Hindoo prince.

ALI came forward, resplendent in an embroidered blue sarong glinting with threads of gold, a kerchief studded with gold brooches in which rubies and emeralds gleamed, a jacket of white silk spun with gold thread and set along the borders with dull jewels. The carved ivory handle of a war-kriss projected from his girdle, and a spear hung loose in his left hand. He smiled brightly as he recognized Cochrane and old Sora, and he rushed forward to put his palms together and place them dutifully in the old man's, then turned to wring Cochrane's outstretched hand in a hearty English handclasp.

"You have come, my friend, and my heart sings within me!" he exclaimed. "Thou too, Grandfather Sora—it shall not be forgotten!"

"Ai, panghulu!" mumbled Sora adoringly. "Long I waited in the city of the white man, around the steps of the hotel. And lo, Allah sent us yonder Inggris,"—indicating Severance,—"who in truth knew the Tuan Cochrane. To him I sold the Antelope Kriss, for a token that the Tuan Cochrane would perceive and come."

"Right-o!" said Cochrane cheerily. "And I'm here, y'see. What is the last news of this swine, your respected uncle the Rajah Suib, eh?"

"Evil," said Ali solemnly. "Sora, my wise old *muntri,* thou and I have in truth lived to see the Orang Blanda bring peace and prosperity to this land. Our rice-barns are full; war and strife are gone on the hills; all the rattan that my people can cut in the jungle the Orang Blanda take, and they pay us well; and now messengers tell me that this mine ingrate uncle plots an uprising of all our clans against these same Orang Blanda, our protectors and benefactors. 'Twas because he knew in his soul that I would take no part in such evil that he made that accusation against me, Sora. Ai, Tuan, may Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate, change his heart before the Orang Blanda's soldiers come upon us—for heavy indeed is their hand!"

"Jolly go, what!" sniffed Cochrane. "The Dutch will have you all in their prison at Sourabaya if there is a row. What clans and tribes, have you learned, Ali, are taking part in this?"

"All the Five Kotas, the fanatical Korintjis—thou knowest, Tuan, them that are the strictest of the followers of Mahomet and abhor all unbelieving dogs of white

men—and the wild and savage Redjangs, too, sorry animals of the jungle, swine of the forest who wear no trousers nor sarong but a dirty loin-cloth of woven bark. Even them has my uncle had dealings with. Their chiefs now are gathered at my uncle's council house."

"My word, y'know! Poisonous scoundrel, your respected uncle!—Eh, Severance?" laughed Cochrane.

"Looks like the thing to do is to hunt up the nearest Dutch controlleur and get busy," said Severance. "We have the car, you know."

"No—not a hope!" demurred Cochrane. "That's the trouble with the Dutch. Too overbearing with their natives. Too keen to call out their soldiers and make a military affair of it, when a bit of diplomacy by one single white man would smooth out everything. We'll have to go it alone, y'see."

"You aren't going *alone* into that council of unruly natives, are you?" asked Severance incredulously. "We'd all be krissed."

COCHRANE shook his head. "There's more to this than meets the eye, youngster," he grinned. "If I know anything of the subtleties of Oriental character, this old rajah has no more idea of colliding with the Dutch than *you* have—not without some ultimate gain to himself at the bottom of it all. We've got to trap him at it. Unearth the swine's little game, y'see. Shall we be getting back to the car now? There's a lot to do."

Severance walked beside him down the path to the road. He could not for the life of him see how this thing was going to be managed without inviting the treacherous stab of a kriss or the subtle poison route of refreshments offered the intruding whites by the wily Suib. They would simply disappear into the wilds of central Sumatra, and some gauzy tale be invented by the Malays to appease the Dutch inquiry concerning their fate, sure to follow. Debt-slavery for Ali, and death for them, was the only outcome he could foresee—or else a fight with their revolvers and a get-away in the car—a most regrettable circumstance, however it might be explained to the Dutch controlleur.

The shining body of the motor appeared down the road beyond the next turn. Tall palms leaned out over the road here, overhanging the cave of the thatch roof of the *passangrahan.* But as they approached the car, a gorgeous native, in rainbow-hued sarong and tight trousers striped in yellow and red like a barber's pole, approached Cochrane and presented him a parchment package with many salaams.

"From the Rajah Mulei Mahomet Suib to the Kumpanie Controlleur, the Presence before whose august feet we grovel," he mumbled. "A thousand salaams! The Presence is my father and my mother! May his years be as the sands of the sea!"

Cochrane took it without the quiver of an eyelid. "Ah! Severance—*as* might be expected!" he exclaimed. "The wily Rajah's put his foot in his own trap. He's heard of the presence of our motor and is playing safe—entirely safe, y'see. The swine's taken us to be the controlleur himself. My word!"

The letter bore three *chops* or seals in beaten silver. The Rajah's messenger greeted Ali civilly but suspiciously. He seemed put out that Ali had somehow reached the controlleur with his story first; but he too was playing safe—for Ali might be the next rajah, for all he knew, before this affair was over.

Cochrane broke the seals and opened the letter. "Hm! . . . . I say, Ali!" he exclaimed. "Poisonous scoundrel—rather! Read it!"

Ali glanced through the long and tedious list of the rajah's titles, a similar set of honorifics addressed to the Controlleur, and then his eyes concentrated on the gravamen of the letter. As he read, his brow darkened, and that sudden and fierce Malay anger contorted his face to a fury. *"Hai!* Faithless and perfidious!" he snorted. "I go, Tuan! I cast it in his teeth!"

Cochrane restrained the impetuous Ali. *"Ya nanti!"* (Take it easy!) "Go in the car, with me, Prince. No manner of sense in ditching the white man's aid, is there? I'm the controlleur, y'know!" He winked for the benefit of all save the Rajah's messenger.

He urged them into the car. "There's warm calamity in that letter, Severance," chortled Cochrane as they settled themselves while the motor sped on toward Kota Pasir. "You haven't your revolver, have you? Might come handy. No end of a row, I take it."

With a flourish of horn-squawks the car presently drew up before the *balei* of the Rajah Suib. A teak house with many-

horned roof it was, rising by the roadside, one entire wall open to the monsoon breeze. A truly Oriental scene greeted them as they ascended the steps of the *balei* and entered the council hall. Rajah Mulei Suib sat in his chair of state, his golden betel-stand at his elbow, his *muntri* bearing the state sword Choree at his right, his *Orang-kaya*, or treasurer, at his left. Around him stood or squatted Malay chieftains of the Five Kotas, in gorgeous sarongs, jeweled head-kerchiefs, amazingly striped and flowered jackets and trousers, the carved ivory handles of their krisses jutting from their girdles. Five tall, dark Korintji chiefs, all in white burnouses of the Arab costume that they affected, and three of them wearing the green turban which signifies a pilgrimage to Mecca, stood gathered in an arrogant group at one side of the hall. Half a dozen wild and barbarous Redjangs, naked save for their loin-cloths, stood leaning on spears at the opposite side. As he glanced at them all, Severance felt as never before the presence of an utterly hostile and foreign body of men, diametrically different in ideas, ideals and codes from himself. And for Cochrane and he to come here, on no matter what obligation of friendship for this comparatively obscure Sumatran chieftain, seemed stark foolhardiness.

BUT Ali had already taken the matter out of his hands, for before the Rajah could rise to greet the white men, he strode down the hall, his face a dark cloud of ire.

"O treacherous and perfidious!" he thundered. "Men of the Five Kotas, the Korintji, the Redjangs—ye are betrayed one and all, to the Orang Blanda!"

The Rajah gaped upon him and looked around the assemblage in feigned protest. An uneasy murmur grew, gathered to a sharp roar of expostulation, fear, denial. Those who had not already assumed a humble and a squatting posture upon the entrance of the white controlleur now made haste to do so. All eyes were turned on Cochrane as Ali handed him the Rajah's letter with the three silver *chops*.

Cochrane, with Severance close at his side, advanced to the center of the *balei* and began to read in Malay:

"'The Rajah Mulei Mahomet Suib, whose residence is at Kota Pasir, king of kings, son of the Rajah Aour Allam, of the line of Menangkabau which descended from heaven by the prophet Adam, master of the lance ornamented with the beard of Jangee, whose betel-stand is of gold set with diamonds, who is possessed of a sword named Choree which slew the evil spirit Si-Muno—' I fawncy that is enough of the blighter's titles. Listen, chiefs: 'Know, then, O Controlleur, that certain seditious and rebellious chieftains of the Korintji, the Redjangs and mine own Five Kotas, are even now gathered at my *balei* and do plot uprising against the august and beneficent rule of the Orang Blanda under which we blossom as the flowering palm. Thy servant is unable to restrain their violence, whereat mine unworthy liver crumbles to pieces within me. Therefore, if the Presence will but deign to appear with suitable soldiers—'"

A yell of rage interrupted Cochrane's further reading. A torrent of accusations, denials, reproaches broke out. The amazing treachery of their own rajah in inciting them to rebellion and then selling them out to the Dutch government, as this letter witnessed, seemed unbelievable. Loyalty to the clan, to one's own people—

A Korintji chieftain leaped to his feet with drawn kriss. "Thou filthy and misbegotten swine!" he hissed upon the Rajah. "Was it not thou and thou only who talked of war and uprising, who filled our ears with discontent? And for this! Nay, let the Presence hear and judge!"

"I hear, and I judge!" boomed Cochrane, tapping the letter significantly.

The Redjangs grunted threateningly; the chiefs of the Five Kotas turned on their rajah with black looks, with the bewildered accusations of men who had listened to counsels of disloyalty and rebellion and now found themselves betrayed by the very man who had been their ringleader.

Ali seized the ripe moment.

"Rajah Mulei Suib, take, if you will, the Orang Blanda's favor for this thine act; but I, I that have served thee all my life, in loyalty and honor, even as my father and my father's father before me served thy house—lo, now do I cast down the ancient kriss of fealty before thine unworthy feet!"

THERE was a ringing clang of steel as the Antelope Kriss clashed to the floor and slid along it to the Rajah's feet. It lay there, a long and snaky thing of steel, infinitely sinister, symbol of a loyalty that

nothing but this abysmal treachery of the Rajah to his own people could have broken. It was the signal for a similar action on the part of all the other chiefs. The whole body of them swayed toward the Rajah, now cowering in his chair and looking with appealing eyes to Cochrane for aid, approval. Naked krisses flashed out. Whether they were to be cast before the Rajah, as had been Ali's, or plunged into his body, no man could foresee.

"Stop!" barked Cochrane. "Judgment, chiefs! The judgment of your white controlleur!"

A TENSE tableau waited on his words. It needed but a spark to set off a savage massacre. Cochrane faced the cringing ruler, who stared at him, bewildered. Where was the gratitude of man! Was not the white magistrate going to take his part, reward him? Suib's face became one hideous wrinkle of rage and fear. Severance kept his hand on his revolver-butt. He knew enough of the Malay character to realize that the man was capable of almost any desperate and bloody outburst now.

"O poisonous and accursed swine, that betrayed them who trusted thee—thou art not *fit* to rule!" Cochrane's words bit and lashed the wretch before him. "For the rest, O chiefs, it shall be forgotten, seeing that ye were but as children led astray. But thou, Mulei Suib, *Ya Allah!* Treacherous to thine own! *That* the white man does never forgive! Thou art deposed! Deal with him, ye chiefs!"

Severance kept watching the desperate and deposed rajah narrowly. When a Malay thinks that the slings and arrows of outrageous calamity have made life unbearable, he has but one recourse. For answer, the Rajah snatched up the Antelope Kriss with a bitter snarl of rage.

"Amok! Amok!" he screamed, darting from his chair and striking right and left with the snaky weapon. He had become a wild beast, with his hand against everyone, every man's kriss seeking him, to be pursued and hunted down until slain out in the jungle. There was a rasp of steel as his kriss crossed Ali's spear; then he burst from the door with a dozen avenging Malays at his back.

"Amok! Amok!" rang out the dread cry through the village. Women and children screamed as they rushed for the shelter of their houses. Men darted right and left as the maniac ran down the sandy areas under the palms, brandishing the bloody weapon, slashing blindly at those unfortunate enough to be within reach. And then, from a hut porch in the village, a long javelin soared through the air in a high arc, descended in a gleaming flash, buried its blade between his shoulders—and a dusty heap of tawdry finery fell to the sand, kicked convulsively, lay still.

"Poor devil!" rumbled Cochrane in his throat as they watched from the *balei* porch. "Poor devil! . . . . Well, Rajah Ali,—for I take it you succeed him on the throne of the Five Kotas,—I'll report this affair to the controlleur for you. Any time I can do a bit for you, y'know—just send the kriss again. Tell these Korintjis, and the other warlike swine, to go back peacefully to their tribes—and there will be no soldiers. Good-by, *muntri!* —Shall we be taking the car back to Medan, Severance? . . . . Oh, not at all, Ali, not a bit of it! The white man's burden, y'know." And Cochrane stepped into his car, leaving the new rajah with grateful tears in his eyes.

"Royal Bengal," another of these true-to-fact and deeply interesting stories of the East Indies which are the result of Warren H. Miller's recent voyages far off the beaten track in the Orient, will appear in an early issue. Mr. Miller's experiences have been extremely unusual, and combined with his native talent for fiction-writing, they enable him to offer you stories that are well worth watching for.

Lilies of the Lord

A very moving story of one of the strangest regions of America, the Louisiana South Coast—by the gifted author of "Cap'n Didier Stands Pat," "The Daughter of Nez Coupe" and many other well-remembered stories.

By MEIGS O. FROST

THEY knew that Mike Meagher was dallying with death.

The little group of Louisiana South Coast shrimpers and oystermen who sat around the main room of the store at Bassa Bassa platform had warned him. Low-toned words of caution had come to him from time to time as the bottle was shoved across the counter, and man after man poured his four fingers of raw and burning liquor.

But the burly foreman of Lem Ballard's cypress lumber-camp "slashin's" in the deep swamp had laughed at them. Deliberately he was going out of his way to insult old Pierre Lafargue.

Mike was an "izzer," not a "haswuzzer," he was perfectly willing to inform the cock-eyed world. This old bird might have fought his weight in wildcats in his time, but Mike could fight his weight in buzz-saws any day his friends cared to name. He took the same malicious pleasure in prodding the silent old man in his downfall that he took in wantonly kicking in the ribs of the bullies of his swamp-gang when it came to open fight and he had them down.

He should worry, Mike announced. He had taken care of himself in a few years of hell and high water. If it came to court-stuff, Lem Ballard was back of him, wasn't he? Ballard had liked being run off Isle d'Or at the muzzle of a shotgun by this same old shrimp just as much as he, Mike, had liked it. Nobody mixed it with Lem Ballard without getting marked up. And that went for Mike Meagher, seven days a week. Did they get that?

It was the week after Ballard had bought in the holdings of Pierre Lafargue —bought them of the legal dummy in whose name he had filed the spite-suit that so successfully shattered the ancient titles running back through a maze of French and Spanish grants of Louisiana lands. From the courthouse in Gretna, on whose steps the Lafargue property had been sold, the word had spread swiftly down the South Coast.

And now, this evening, by evil chance,

the gasoline launches of Mike Meagher and Pierre Lafargue himself had moored at Bassa Bassa wharf.

STUDIOUSLY Pierre had ignored the presence of Ballard's bully; and this had not improved Meagher's temper in the least. Both had walked up the long wharf runway to the platform store. It was the only place to go. There Pierre had greeted old friends and made some purchases, again ignoring Meagher. Placide Rigaud, the platform boss, had urged him to stay to supper. Pierre stayed. Silently, waiting for the meal, he sat in one of the rough splint-bottomed chairs of the store with its piles of boat- and fishing-gear, its shelves of canned goods, its piles of flour and bacon and coffee. Beyond one courteous acceptance, he refused all drink.

But Meagher was drinking heavily. His raucous remarks arose for all to hear.

"Go easy, Mike," whispered Felix Rachou. "Don't make any mistake about old Pierre. He's poison when you pick on him."

What Felix Rachou whispered was common knowledge to all natives of the South Coast. They knew the Lafargues of old. They knew the code under which the men of that family had lived and died. Many of them had seen the priceless pair of dueling pistols in the big house at Isle d'Or—the pistols that Pierre and his father before him had used more times than man readily remembered. For the code lingered long in Louisiana's far settlements, where men yet lived who in their youth had stood beneath the Oaks in New Orleans. In that tradition Pierre Lafargue had been reared.

But Mike Meagher was scornful.

"That old buzzard?" he proclaimed loudly. "If he makes a swipe at me, I'll tear him apart and show you what makes him tick! Let him pull his gun, if he's got one. I'll slap him loose from it and spank him with it."

They sought to quiet him, but Meagher was beyond reason now. He spoke aloud of matters of which the South Coast had only guessed before.

"He runs me and Ballard off his place when the boss wants to buy it, does he?" Meagher's voice rumbled. "Well, what does that get him? Who owns the place now? Who owns the cypress swamp, I'm asking you? Who owns the plantation? Lem Ballard; that's who owns the whole works. Who'll get an eviction-order inside of a week? That old buzzard Lafargue—that's who'll get it. We'll make a bunk-house for the flathead gang from the slashin's outa that big Isle d'Or house of his. That's what we'll do. He'll be around begging for a hand-out before we're through with him. When Lem Ballard goes after a man, he gets him."

The friendly group of platform folk were silent, now, and tense. They knew when a man neared the dead-line with old Pierre Lafargue. They had done all in decency that South Coast folk could do. They waited.

Still Pierre sat silent in his splint-bottomed chair, smoking.

And then Mike Meagher crossed the dead-line.

"Yah," he spat. "Him and his high-mighty ways. We'll have him begging for a hand-out, and we'll have that Celeste girl waiting on table for the flatheads, the stuck-up slut."

AS quietly as though he were answering the dinner-call, Pierre Lafargue rose from his chair. Lightly his wiry old figure stepped across the space that separated him from Meagher.

"Meagher," said he in his gentle Old World voice, "a man of my age does not fight with his fists against a man like you. You have just mentioned my granddaughter, whose name does not belong on your lips. There is yet light outside on the wharf. I know you have a gun. I have never yet fought with *canaille* such as you, but it seems I have no choice."

"Gun?" mocked Meagher. "You shriveled-up old crawfish, d'you think I'm needing a gun on you?"

"You will use one, or be shot where you stand like the gutter-dog you are," said Pierre Lafargue softly. "Will you come outside?"

He stood, waiting courteously.

"I'll break you over my knee!" bellowed Meagher, tensing for the rush. But he stood immobile. The old man's hand had flashed forward beneath his vest. From waistband holster he flipped the heavy revolver.

"I go prepared since mad dogs like Ballard and you run free on the South Coast," he said quietly. He turned sidewise, as one would bow a guest through an open door. "Come outside," sounded his silken invitation.

Meagher's right hand darted to his hip.

Meticulously old Pierre Lafargue watched until he saw the flash of the metal. Then crashing sound roared in the close air of the store—one explosion.

There was a moment of silence and acrid powder-smoke. It was the voice of Lafargue that first broke that silence.

"My apologies, Placide," said he to the platform boss of Bassa Bassa. "I sought, as you will bear witness, to have him go outside. But these *canaille* know no code. Is not Henri Laporte of your men a deputy sheriff? Will you call him, so that I can surrender?"

They had no need to send for Henri Laporte. From another part of the broad shrimp-drying platform he had come running at the sound of the shot. He entered as Pierre was speaking. Swiftly they told him of the affray.

"There is no need for you to surrender," he told Pierre Lafargue. "I go up the bayou to Gretna tomorrow and report to the sheriff. Your bond can be arranged until the grand jury meets. Dismiss it from your mind. You will never face judge or jury for this."

"He may never face judge in Gretna, but there is One, a Judge, he must face."

AT the sound of that voice, hats came off a score of heads—heads that had stayed covered before the body of Mike Meagher, slumped there on the floor.

In their midst stood Père Duchassois, the little South Coast priest of the Oblate Fathers, in black cassock and biretta, the heavy brass crucifix of his order thrust in his girdle. His mission launch had been swinging at mooring at Bassa Bassa platform through the day. Worn from an all-night vigil with a dying platform woman, he had been asleep in the tiny cabin. And he too had headed for the store at the sound of the shots.

"But, Père Duchassois—" spoke one, and with swift outpouring of the racing South Coast Cajun *argot,* he told of what had befallen before the two pistols spoke.

The little priest, his weather-tanned face grave, listened to the tale. He stepped forward silently, where the body lay crumpled on the floor. With steady hands he straightened the limbs and from his own pocket drew the handkerchief he spread over the still face that so short a space before had been distorted with drink and wrath.

A moment he knelt in prayer for the soul of the dead.

Rising, he stepped over to Pierre Lafargue and gripped his arm. Pierre was the older of the two, but—

"My son, come with me," said Father Duchassois. He led the way out across the store gallerie, down the runway and into the little cabin cruiser that was his floating church.

LONG hours later Pierre Lafargue emerged. Without word to any soul he walked down the wharf, stepped into his own small launch and headed back up the bayou path for the big house on Isle d'Or.

No man ever knew what happened in the cabin of that mission boat—the little inclosure that had been the scene of so many outpourings of human grief and woe on the South Coast. But then, no man followed Pierre Lafargue back to the Isle d'Or.

His face was a curious study as he entered the home of the Lafargues, that night.

From a high shelf in his room he took down the priceless pair of dueling pistols that had made strange and vivid history in Louisiana.

Thoughtfully the old man gazed at the weapons in their case of dull mahogany. Their silver-inlaid walnut butts, the delicately chased hammers and trigger-guards, the damascened barrels, the cap-case, powder-flask and bullet-molds that were the last word of modernity when his father had bought them—all these spoke a definite language to him. They brought back memories of a code under which he had lived, a code under which he had demonstrated often he was willing to die—but a code that now, in the evening of life, he had deserted at the hot pleading of Père Duchassois.

" 'Vengeance is Mine. I will repay,' saith the Lord."

The little priest's surging words still echoed in his ears.

Out to the verge of the ramshackle Isle d'Or wharf he walked in the eerie light of a great white moon that now shone above the topmost branches of the live-oaks in their trailing robes of Spanish moss.

First from his waistband he drew the heavy revolver that had brought death to Meagher. It splashed and sank in mid-bayou.

Once more he opened the mahogany case and gazed at the two weapons it held.

"I would have wished to have used you once again under the code, to right a great wrong," he said slowly. "But at that, you are hardly the arms one takes to kill a dog."

The silver catch of the pistol-case clicked shut. The thin hand and wiry old arm drew back—shot forward.

Over and over again the case circled, rising high.

Like the splash of a leaping gar sounded the impact as it struck the surface of the slumbering bayou. Moonlight glittered like new-coined silver on the ripples where it sank.

Slowly again Pierre Lafargue repeated the words of Père Duchassois.

"'Vengeance is Mine. I will repay,' saith the Lord."

A bitter smile crossed his face, a smile sardonic and acrid.

"It is well, perhaps, that the Lord has eternity in which to work," he said softly. "He needs it before He balances accounts with such *canaille* as Lem Ballard."

THIS much, at least, could always be said of Lem Ballard. He was consistent.

If he had no friends, he wanted none. If the men with whom he dealt did not trust him, neither did he trust them. If, as he frequently said, a thousand dollars in the bank was worth more than a thousand friends in the street, he seemed satisfied with his choice. He had the thousand dollars before he was twenty. The years that followed he devoted to accumulating many additional thousands to keep them company.

His life was a standing mockery of all standards of fair play and decent dealing. Yet never, from the time he built his first sawmill in the early days of Louisiana's lumber-trade expansion, to the sharp trickery of his later deals that ran high into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, was he ever found outside the law.

His cowardice the South Coast learned early, when one looted landowner—"half his size," said the Beeg Swamp folk, contemptuously—thrashed him thoroughly as the only possible satisfaction for a law-proof theft. His ratlike cunning the South Coast learned thereafter. Since he emerged from that episode, he went his way with personal bodyguard through the coastal cypress-lumber country, as he went his way through the jungles of the law-courts surrounded by his legal men-at-arms. He had the dollars. He had learned that they would buy gunmen or rough-and-tumble fighters as they would buy lawyers. He needed both in his business. He used both, ruthlessly.

The growth of his fortune seemed in no way to lessen the queer malignancy of his plans. There seemed within him a driving force that sent him out, when all need of further accumulation was past, to wrest profits and holdings from others. Some cursed him bitterly. Others threatened. Yet others sued. Always in the end, however, it was Ballard who emerged with the winner's purse in his pocket.

Up and down the South Coast, where his holdings of the invaluable cypress swamp had grown, grew likewise the tradition of his sinister power and the malignancy with which he had used it.

And then he had cast eyes upon the holdings of Pierre Lafargue.

"MEAGHER was always a fool."

It was Lem Ballard who was speaking. The other man in his New Orleans office was Père Duchassois. Straight from the slaying at Bassa Bassa platform the little priest had gone to New Orleans to seek out the man whose henchman had died beneath Pierre Lafargue's pistol, and to explain what had preceded the shooting—more than that, to tell the lumberman of the pledge that had been given by old Pierre during the hours the priest had labored with the man who for so many years had lorded it over Isle d'Or.

"From what you tell me," Ballard's voice ran smoothly on, "Meagher talked of matters he had no business to discuss. He started the trouble. Even if he had been in the wrong, I know how difficult it would be to get a conviction against Lafargue from a jury of his South Coast friends. But I am glad the old man has promised to quit the warpath. Otherwise I should have had no choice but to prosecute to the limit and see that he was placed under bond."

"Under bond?" Père Duchassois' brows rose interrogatively.

"In my own case, in event I could not get a conviction in Meagher's case," said Ballard. "There have come to me reports of possible trouble since I bought Lafargue's property."

"I can guarantee you need fear no violence from the old man," the little priest said again. "I came here largely to reassure you on that particular point. He has sustained a heavy loss, I am told. I would make matters as easy for him as possible."

Ballard thought for a moment, and smiled.

"Sometimes in business we lose sight of the personal equation," he said. "I'm sorry if the old gentleman is in straits. The best proof of that is that I will see he is offered employment."

Père Duchassois expressed suitable thanks and departed. But behind his sun-tanned brow his thoughts were busy.

IT was Sheriff Alcibiade Marais himself who served, a few days after this, the eviction-order on Pierre Lafargue. Too many years had they been friends for that task to be intrusted to any tactless young deputy. The reluctance with which the sheriff served that order was no greater than that of the judge who signed it. But both knew that there is a point where friendship, however ancient, must step aside, once the law has spoken.

Down the twisting bayous that afternoon the Sheriff's swift little express cruiser bore him—his steed of office in his wide and wave-washed jurisdiction.

They saw him coming as he rounded the last turn by the cove, Pierre and three of his South Coast friends on the shaded gallerie of the big house at Isle d'Or. They waved greetings as he fought to nose his path through the floating fields of water-hyacinths that massed in green and purple glory before the tumbledown wharf.

He moored his boat and made his way over the sagging planks to the gallerie steps. He shook hands with them all. Then, drawing Pierre to one side, gently as man might, he told the bad news and served the papers.

"Need some character witnesses, Pierre?" asked Achille Prevenue as the legal form passed from hand to hand. He strove for friendly joke to lighten the gloom.

Old Pierre Lafargue's voice held gentle and steady as he spoke—in the bayou French, as always when deeply stirred.

"Character has little to do with this, *mes amis,*" said he. "You heard what Meagher threatened that day at Bassa Bassa. It has come. I have overstayed my welcome at Isle d'Or. Lem Ballard now owns it—and he has had me evicted."

"He's a sorry scoundrel, that fella," said Sheriff Alcibiade. "But he's got the law with him. Seems like he always has."

There was a wealth of sympathy in his voice. But old Pierre's calm remained unshaken.

Not for him the loud-spoken "Eheu!" the "Ho-ee!" or the "W'at yo' t'ink o' dat, hein?" of the little group about him. Not for him the clenched fist of Achille Prevenue, the softly-caressing grip of Pascal Coletti on knife-haft, the great open-air oaths of Hypolite Garsaud.

He was the last of the Lafargues, who took their losses as they took their gains, like Creole gentlefolk.

One did not complain publicly, even when the loss swept away the big weed-overgrown plantation whose ten thousand acres of "sweet land," once in sugar, it no longer paid to operate without slave labor and with a wildly fluctuating sugar market—a plantation none the less beloved as it stretched in tangled splendor from the banks of Bayou Barataria clear back beyond the Forty Arpent Line.

No, one did not complain publicly, even when the wreckage of the Lafargue fortunes carried with it the broad reaches of cypress swamp, now more valuable for its everlasting timber than the very plantation itself—took, too, the big house on Isle d'Or where the Lafargues had lorded it since the memory of man on the South Coast.

Not even when the loss meant God knew what to P'tite Celeste, daughter of his dead son! The little maid now was studying in the New Orleans convent where the Lafargue women had always gone for their schooling. Her expenses, however cheerfully met, had become a drain long before this, with the shortage of ready cash.

And to lose all this by sharp trickery! To be stripped more bare than the lowliest shrimp-platform worker! He—a Lafargue!

But that had nothing to do with the present moment. There were guests on the gallerie.

"My friends," said Pierre, "shall we not have some coffee? And will you not stay tonight? Felipe has fresh crabs and a ham for that famous *gombo* of his. There are catfish taken off the trot-line less than an hour ago."

They could not stay the night, they

protested, despite his hospitable insistence. But they would have coffee. One always has coffee on the South Coast.

So presently they sat near the clay charcoal-furnace in which Alessandro, one of Pierre's two remaining servants, boiled the water. With the timeless leisure of the bayou world, they talked amidst the smoke of unnumbered cigarettes of the harsh black "string tobacco," while they drank the thick black drip that fulfilled the Beeg Swamp coffee-recipe: "Blackeh'n a niggeh's heel, strongeh'n Arkansaw religion, an' hotteh'n the hinges o' hell."

Gently old Pierre led the talk in channels less distasteful than his own crashing misfortune. His friends understood.

WHEN at last they rose to go, the sun was slanting westward. The luggers of Achille and Pascal and Hypolite were tugging at their moorings beside the Sheriff's little cruiser. Out to the wharf-edge old Pierre accompanied them.

Achille Prevenue gripped his host's hand in farewell, and spoke shyly.

"I got me mo' cash'n I need in dat Gretna bank, Pierre," he said. "Anyt'ing yo' want, ol' friend—"

But the last of the Lafargues, gently as he voiced his thanks and his refusal, was adamantine. Likewise when Hypolite and Pascal made it plain, with equal shyness, that their homes were his. They would deem it both privilege and honor, they said. He knew they spoke truth. But still he held firm.

At last they shoved off from the wharf, leaving him standing with the Sheriff.

"Now le's go back to the gallerie an' sit down fo' a bit an' talk this oveh, Pierre," said Alcibiade.

They lowered themselves into the big chairs, lit cigarettes again.

"Them shysteh lawyehs—" began the Sheriff.

"Don't blame them, Alcibiade," said Pierre quietly. "They're just the hired men. I should have known what was coming, from the day I had Ballard thrown off the place."

The Sheriff sat silent for a moment, brows knit. Then:

"I heard somethin' that Meagher said 'bout that, jus' befo' yo' got him, Pierre," said he. "But that story is all I know. How come yo' threw him off'm the place with that big bruiseh o' his? Yo' neveh said a wohd—an' nach'lly he wouldn't."

Pierre's memory had flashed back many months. Slowly at first he spoke to his friend—and then swiftly toward the end. His words painted clear-cut a picture of this last achievement of Lem Ballard's malignancy. The Sheriff nodded understandingly. The details clicked in his mind with what he knew of both men.

It had been long months before, ran Pierre's quickly told tale, that Ballard had come to Isle d'Or to buy the Lafargue cypress-swamp holdings. The price he offered was pitifully low. Old Pierre had waved it scornfully aside.

But the price had not been the real reason for his refusal to do business. That he made plain. He detested the man. That too he made plain. For Ballard was wholly foreign to the old Creole code of dealings meticulously honorable, the code to which the Lafargues had held through generations. Under that code, bankrupts committed suicide.

"You do no business with me," he told Ballard, "even though my land is on the market."

"Why?" the man had exploded wrathfully.

"Because I have no dealings with the thief who robbed my friend Delvaille Boisvergne."

Here the Sheriff nodded again, in swift comprehension. The whole South Coast knew *that* story.

While Boisvergne and his family had been in Europe one summer, a lumber-crew had taken possession of his wide acres of cypress holdings in a far section of the parish. Under a heavy-fisted foreman they had labored throughout that summer. By the time the Boisvergnes returned, the timber, worth tens of thousands, had been stripped and had vanished into a yawning market—as the lumber-crew had vanished into thin air. The office of the "South Coast Cypress Company" in a New Orleans office-building, from which had come orders and cash to that crew, was found vacant.

The South Coast folk learned in time that the heavy-fisted foreman had been one of Lem Ballard's men. But he had vanished too—sent, said rumor, to the Pacific Coast to keep him out of the way until trouble died down. Ballard, brought before a grand jury when Boisvergne sought redress, had testified that the man had left his employ long before the historic raid on the Boisvergne holdings.

"My books are open," he laughed—and then talked counter-suit for slander. It was never filed. But there was no legal proof against Ballard. He went free. He always went free.

But that foreman, before he left, had talked, drunken, to a swamp woman whose cabin he had frequented. Before she too vanished, whispers had circulated—widening—widening.

"You do no business with me," said Pierre Lafargue, coldly contemptuous.

"You'll sell, or I'll make it so hot for you you'll quit," had been Ballard's counter.

Never raising his voice from that gentle South Coast drawl, Lafargue had ordered him off Isle d'Or. It meant less than nothing to him that this unjailed thief needed the Lafargue cypress to insure continued supply for the big sawmill he had built on the Mississippi River levee some two-score miles away, 'cross-river from New Orleans.

Ballard, safe with the sense of nearness of Mike Meagher, his bodyguard on that trip, grew obscenely profane.

Lafargue's voice gave an order, in curious, crisp contrast to the drawl that had preceded it. Meagher and his master found themselves looking into the muzzle of an eight-gauge duck-gun in the hands of Felipe, one of Pierre's house-servants. Ballard found himself gripped unceremoniously by the wiry hands of Alessandro, the other of Lafargue's two men. Kicking and cursing, he was carried down the little wharf and tossed like a sack of potatoes into his boat. The bodyguard, hands still raised, followed him.

Casting off the mooring, Alessandro with a mighty shove sent the little craft spinning out into mid-bayou, still in range of Felipe's mighty duck-gun.

"Keep away from Isle d'Or," advised Pierre Lafargue gently.

"I'll run you off it," gritted Ballard as his cruiser headed townward.

THE Sheriff whistled, long and low. He had seen the court record. He could piece out the rest. None knew better than he how Ballard, back in town, had summoned his legal men-at-arms, sharp and ruthless as the man they served. None knew better than he what that type of lawyer, unleashed, backed by money, can do.

In those Lafargue titles, dating back through the jumble of Louisiana's French and Spanish grants, they had found all the hole they needed. Through that hole they had scurried, like the rats they were. Then in court after court, gnawing, gnawing, they had made their way—until the structure that generations of Lafargues carelessly had thought sound had toppled and left the last of the line beaten down amid the ruins.

And Lem Ballard had bought the ruins—bought them from the complaisant, weak-kneed tool whose gambling debts he had paid and in whose name he had seen to it the suits of the "contending heir" had been brought.

"An' nobody in the world can eveh hang it on him!"

Wholeheartedly the Sheriff cursed while Pierre Lafargue looked out from the wide old gallerie in the light of the setting sun, watching his beloved bayou, where the floating fields of water-hyacinths were a glory of green and purple.

"Probably not in this world," said Pierre.

Sheriff Marais looked up sharply. Somehow the remark sounded strange on the lips of a Lafargue.

"Made any plans w'at yo' goin' do, ol' friend?"

He had not, said Pierre. But of course he would give it instant thought. Felipe and Alessandro naturally could find work at any shrimp-platform. There were yet a few days—

They both grew silent.

"I came dam' near slappin' him loose from his ears, the sorry scoundrel," said the Sheriff at last. "That low-down rat Ballard done met me by the canal when I was gettin' into my boat to serve these eviction-papehs. Tol' me to tell yo' he didn't want yo' to stahve. Any time yo' wants a job, he said, yo' can have one. Lily-boom tendeh at Berthoud's Cove! That's the job he's got waitin fo' yo'."

Pierre looked up in sudden interest. Ballard had really offered him a job as tender of the lily-boom?

"He sho' did," assented the Sheriff, throwing in from his rich open-air vocabulary a few words of description of the man who made the offer. "I wouldn't insulted yo', Pierre, by tellin' yo' *that* in front o' Achille an' Pascal an' Hypolite. That was all Ballard meant hit fo'—a insult, I reckon. I jus' tol' yo' now, to show yo' how low-down orn'ry he is.

"But I gotta head back to town, Pierre. Now remembeh: If yo' don' come to me an' let me do somethin' fo' yo', soon's yo' make up yo' mind, yo' aint playin' square with yo' ol' friend, Pierre. I can 'point yo' office-deputy or somethin' up the co'thouse."

"I know you'd do me any service I ask, Alcibiade," said the gentle old voice. "I've made up my mind. I'm taking you at your word. When you go back to town, please telephone Ballard and tell him I'll take that job."

Nor would anything dissuade him.

With puzzled brow and affectionate farewell, at last the Sheriff left.

"I wondeh," he mused, as he steered his winding way back to town along the path his searchlight made up the twisting bayou, "I wondeh if th' ol' man's plumb los' his pride an' got childish in this trouble. Or is he foolish jus' lak ol' fox?"

For Alcibiade Marais and his father before him knew something of the Lafargue breed.

But there had been developments of which Alcibiade Marais knew nothing—of which no man knew save Father Duchassois, Lem Ballard and old Pierre himself.

Kneeling in the dark of the home that was his no longer, that night the old man prayed. It was a strange prayer.

Strange blossom had flowered from the seed that Père Duchassois had planted that night Meagher died, as he labored with the old duelist in the little cabin of the mission boat by Bassa Bassa platform.

WHEN would Pierre Lafargue strike back? And how?

Those two questions the South Coast asked of itself while weeks stretched into months. Then, as the months lengthened, gossip touched more rarely on the matter.

But the South Coast never forgot. It never forgets. Old loves, old hates, old fights, old revels—they live forever, seemingly, in that strange world of floating prairie, winding bayou and dimpling bay, with the shrouded depths of the drowned cypress-forest, thick-draped in beards of Spanish moss, ever in the background like the chorus of an ancient Greek tragedy. A chorus all the more tragic in that it stands stricken mute!

The answer would come some time, the men of the South Coast knew. Theirs is a world of peculiar limitations. But within those limits, they have little left to learn. Two centuries of specialized wisdom has been handed down from father to son. It has much to do with trap-line and trot-line, with lugger and with shrimp-platform, with muskrat-trail and oyster-bed, with seine and trawl.

But it has more to do with men.

They know something about men in that watery world, especially their own men. They know the Lafargues of old.

The South Coast went its way and waited.

Only the younger men exclaimed in profane surprise when Pierre Lafargue took Lem Ballard at his word and went to work for his foe. The elders watched. Had he wished their aid, they knew he would have asked. They knew he knew it would have been given.

So he who had sat on the wide gallerie of the old house amid the squat live-oaks of Isle d'Or, dispensing coffee and jest and good cheer to all his friends who passed—and that meant all the natives of the half-submerged world from Des Allemands to the Westwego Levee—he took the job of tender of the lily-boom at Berthoud's Cove.

His quarters now were a one-room floating shack of rough pine boards, roofed with thick ax-split shingles. On a raft of cypress logs floated his tiny house, chained to two upright trunks of cypress piling. One door, one small window shielded by a plank shutter, were all the openings. Inside, a plank bunk, a table, a chair, a two-burner oil-stove, some simple dishes with skillet and coffee-dripper—these were the household equipment of the last of the Lafargues. The Lafargues, who had lorded it over the Isle d'Or! Who had owned the great plantation stretching back beyond the Forty Arpent Line when the Fleur de Lys of France fluttered in New Orleans' Place d'Armes—whose men had died with Lafrenière when Spain's banner of gold and blood rose on that same staff, and the Bloody O'Reilly crushed the first rebellion against a king in the New World!

His task was as simple as his surroundings.

Working the heavy windlass on the raft that was now his home, his was the job to swing wide the long boom of cypress logs, chained end to end, and let the passing bayou craft through the opening. That boom served as barrier lest the floating masses of water-hyacinths—"the

lilies," the South Coast calls them—choke against small-craft navigation Little Barataria Bayou, whose outlet is guarded. For this he received fifty dollars a month, and the ironic praise of the man who now was stripping the cypress swamp of the timber that was the prize of unscrupulous looting.

Day by day, night by night, he held his post, servant of the hoarse hoot of bayou boat whistles. Back and forth those boats snorted fussily on their way between the deep swamp and the bottleneck of Little Barataria Bayou that gave a water-path through the last miles of "trembling prairie" before one reached the Mississippi River at New Orleans.

Through that impassible stretch of swamp the bayou wound past marsh-grass and roseau cane and the scrubby latanier palm as in the days when Jean Lafitte's buccaneer-driven barges sped cityward with the rich cargoes from Red House on Grand Terre by the Mexican Gulf at Barataria Pass.

In the days of Jean Lafitte there were no masses of lilies to block with bright beauty the keels of the South Coast craft. But now, brought as curiosities from Egypt, tossed carelessly in bayous from plantation garden-pools, propagating enormously, they were the mighty menace to inland navigation. And at a time above all when those inland waterways were a vital need for a tremendous trade!

The cypress logs, cut and sawn and marketed, brought up out of the deep swamp greater wealth than all the cargoes with which Jean Lafitte's crews once had stocked the shelves of New Orleans. So the last eight miles of Little Barataria, once a trickling bayou-end, had been dredged clean and straight, a canal leading from the winding water-path up alongside the levee on which stood Ballard's great cypress mill.

Up out of the swamps where ebony giants of "fallers," negroes stripped to the waist, with ringing axes brought the columned trunks down prone for pull-boats and skidders to drag them out into deep bayou, came the long rafts of trimmed logs chained together and towed by launches to the river-levee. There they fed the snarling saws of the mill. Mile-long they moved in steady procession past the little shack of old Pierre Lafargue, who once had owned them.

Only one force blocked their progress —the lilies.

Spreading through the bayou world as mullet spawn in warm shallows, acre on acre of waxy green bulbs and leaves with purple blooms rising spikily above, the hyacinths invaded bayou and lake and cove. The long tendrils of their bleached roots beneath the surface, swaying as seaweed sways, caught the faintest urge of the current. Toward the Gulf of Mexico and death in its salt waters they moved, rank on rank of jade-armored knights with banners of imperial purple, as the bayous lazed sluggishly southward. Upstream they retreated from time to time to the push of the Gulf's incoming tide.

Like skirmishing vanguard clumps of shining spears, little groups of them sailed here and there. These the gasoline boats tore apart with their propellers, trampled under spurning keel. But once those clumps of floating skirmishers joined in massed array, no gasoline boat dared charge into the midst of the press. Those slender, swaying roots would wind snake-like around propeller, strangling the choking motors to impotent silence. Those masses of creaking bulbs and leaves would bank up before the bow, beautiful and sinister. They yielded to smashing thrust of pike-pole, to chopping ax and hacking machete-blade, as a feather pillow yields to the blow of a strong man. But they banked up gently, relentlessly, again and again, until all advance was stopped.

Only the big, lumbering stern-wheelers of the bayou fleet, with splintered and thrashing slab paddles, could crush a way through that barrier. The "gazzolines" were conquered.

Government boats might make their trips along the main lines of South Coast traffic, spraying the withering soda solution that shriveled the floating bulbs and cleared the waterways for a while. But ever the lilies grew and spread, born anew full-grown overnight, it seemed, until miles of bayou that once had been free even to skimming pirogue and poled Johnboat of the old days, now were packed solid green from bank to bank, useless to all but the largest craft.

SO Lem Ballard had built the lily-boom at the mouth of Little Barataria. And there, safe in the knowledge that had come from Father Duchassois that the deadly old duelist would fight no more, he made place for the man he had stripped. It was typical brutality.

Strange, warped pleasure he found in the thought of the last of the Lafargues sitting there, day by day, loser of the long and bitter litigation, watching the cypress treasure that once had been his own, now moving past in steady procession to fatten the pockets of his enemy. Wholly unnecessary "trips of inspection," so he called them, he took down Little Barataria in his cruiser, to sound hoarse siren before the lily-boom, to watch the bowed old figure walk out of the tiny floating shack, bending back to the windlass that opened the path for his enemy's passing.

Even, time after time, he would stop at the little shack to ask quite needless questions about the movements of the log-rafts—details he knew already. For the slender strand of the company's private telephone line, following the bayou's winding bank, reached down from the levee sawmill into the swamp "slashings." Part of Pierre's job was to telephone from his shack the time when the rafts passed through the boom on their way millward.

But though Ballard passed the lily-boom to feed his malignant satisfaction at the downfall of the man who had defied him, others there were who stopped with kindly word and shyly proffered small gift. Of these were Achille Prevenue and Pascal Coletti and Hypolite Garsaud, who surged up from time to time with their lugger-loads of shrimp and oysters and the high-piled cargoes of sun-dried Spanish moss for the mattress-factories in New Orleans. In the sun on the raft they sat and gossiped. From time to time they brought up from the Barataria post office the letters of P'tite Celeste, written in the careful slanting hand of the convent schoolroom. She as yet knew nothing of the disaster that had befallen Gran'père Pierre. Her bills for the year at the convent had been paid. Much of the old man's fifty dollars a month was going into a worn old wallet for her when that year was ended.

"But will you be able to keep her there another year?"

Hypolite Garsaud, with the troubled mind of old friendship, asked that, one day.

"That I do not yet know," admitted Pierre.

"*Sacré tonnerre de Dieu!*" burst forth Hypolite with a mighty surge of rage. "And every log-raft that passes might be bringing her money for her schooling—for her *dot* when she marries! All to that devil's pig! When do you strike, Pierre? *Nom d'un Nom!* When?"

The last of the Lafargues smiled serenely at his friend.

"That also I do not know," he said. "Suppose we leave that in the hands of *le bon Dieu.*"

"*Le bon Dieu* helps those who help themselves," growled Hypolite. "Never tell me that you, a Lafargue, sit here under a great wrong and talk like a priest. You have your plans, whether you trust them to old friends or no. No man needs tell Pierre Lafargue that *le bon Dieu* helps those who help themselves.

"It is true that I have heard that," conceded Pierre. "But He has not yet made it clear to me that He wishes me to help myself in this."

And that was all Pierre would say. Hypolite went his way, still growling maledictions.

HOARSELY the siren of Lem Ballard's cruiser hooted before the lily-boom. Out into the blazing sun of midday came Pierre Lafargue from his small shack, and bent his back to the windlass. The lilies were banked heavily against the down-stream side. Strongly he pushed at the iron bar. Inch by inch the boom swung outward.

Back and forth on the tiny deck of the cruiser, Ballard paced impatiently. He was in a hurry to get down to the "slashings." Much had happened in his office that morning to irritate him. More irritation awaited, he knew, before he finished the "bawling-out" he planned for the men who drove his deep swamp gang on the Lafargue cypress tract.

"What the devil's the matter with the old mummy?" he muttered, watching the slow progress of the lily-boom. Then—

"Here," he called to his deck hand. "Give me that megaphone over there!"

Over the rail bellowed a blast of invective and obscene commands for haste. The veins of Pierre's neck and forehead swelled with wrath. Not like this were men accustomed to shout at men of his breed. But he held to his rigid control. At last the path lay open.

Down Berthoud's Cove the swift craft sped, skirting the floating islands of lilies banked thick like clots of jade on the black bayou water. Ballard settled back in his deck-chair. Hardly a glance he

gave at a slim white figure coming up the same water-lane down which his boat rushed—a young girl paddling the paper-thin pirogue that is the toothpick cypress dugout of the South Coast.

It was fifteen-year-old Celeste Lafargue.

THAT morning, sent home from the convent till an influenza epidemic in the ranks of its pupils had been checked, she had been landed at Isle d'Or by the mail-boat out of Westwego. There she had found the home of her childhood converted, as Mike Meagher had threatened that day he died, into a bunkhouse for the "flatheads" and "fallers" of the deep swamp gang.

A questioning negro cook stepped up to her as she stood on the tumbledown wharf, with her small school luggage at her feet.

"Pierre Lafargue?" he said not unkindly, to her question. "Oh, yo' means dat ol' man what Ballard done run off'm heah? Why, miss, he's tendin' lily-boom up Berthoud's Cove."

It was mystery at first—stunning puzzlement. And then her startled thoughts raced. If Gran'père Pierre was at the lily-boom, there she must go. Where else?

By the wharf she saw the half-dozen pirogues that cluster about every South Coast settlement landing. She had used one from childhood. Berthoud's Cove was only a few miles away.

"I'll send the pirogue back next boat that comes down," she said. The cook grinned broad assent.

And a moment later, her heart beating with fright, she was speeding up the bayou to the swaying of lithe arms and swift paddle. It was a short journey to the South Coast girl, even in the heat. And at last she rounded the turn into Berthoud's Cove. Its broad reach of water was thick with the clumps of lilies. But there, across them, to be reached by a winding lane of open water, was the little shack of the lily-boom tender.

Carefully she skirted the islands of creaking bulb and leaf and purple bloom. Then toward her she saw the motor-cruiser race downstream.

None knew better than she the danger of its surging wake to the cranky little craft that bore her. With darting glance she looked about to see if there was chance to make shore and safety. The lilies, a swaying mass of brilliant color, stood between her and the bank.

Frantically she waved a hand to motion the cruiser to slow down. Any South Coast boatman would understand her plight, she knew. But the motor throbbed unceasing. The cruiser shot steadily ahead. Down the narrow lane between the masses of the lilies it surged.

Desperately she drove the sharp bow of her pirogue into the mass of creaking bloom. By grasping their waxy stems she sought to keep balance.

"That girl's in trouble," called out the engineer to Ballard.

"Trouble, hell!" called back Ballard with a glance. "They swim like fish, these swamp-rats. You've got your orders. Hit it up."

Neither of them looked behind.

The level field of the lilies shuddered and heaved as the wash of the wake caught it from beneath. Over the pirouge's sharp stern surged a wall of water—nothing to disturb a rowboat, but fatal to the slim dugout cramped amid the lily-stems with only two inches of freeboard.

In open water Celeste would have dived clear. But here, all about her, were the tangling lily-roots. Even her slight weight was too much. The little craft sank.

From his raft old Pierre Lafargue had seen it all, without guessing, even, the identity of the girl. He had sprung into action before Celeste's scream reached his ears. He did not wait to untie the knot that held his light skiff. His pocket-knife slashed the rope. His oars were out. Fast as the wiry old arms could ply the blades, he sped to the spot where the upturned pirogue floated.

Whether that scream reached the cruiser above the rattling volley of its exhaust no man ever knew. It surged on its way and disappeared around the turn.

Searching among the tangled lily-stems old Pierre found the upthrusting bow of the pirogue by the surface, where it had risen, freed of the girl's weight. Presently, probing about, he glimpsed a glimmer of sodden white tangled in the lily-roots.

Leaning far over the side of his skiff, he dragged the girl into the boat.

Then it was that old Pierre Lafargue learned he was indeed the last of his line.

DUSK was coming on when they found Pierre on the little raft with his dead. He raised his head to the shout of Achille

Prevenue. On the deck of Achille's lugger he saw yet another friend, Père Duchassois. The priest's small mission-boat had been left behind for repairs while he went southward with the lugger-man, to keep his promise to hold service next day at the South Coast chapel of Our Lady of the Isle.

Pierre made no move to open the boom. With beckoning arm he waved them to come to the raft. Silently he led them into the little shack where on the narrow bunk lay the slim and sodden figure of his granddaughter.

His voice held low, though his fierce old eyes blazed, as he told them the tale.

"Think not that I hold it against you, Père Duchassois," he said. "There is no quarrel between us. But now I take matters in my own hand, as is the wont of the Lafargues."

He turned to Achille Prevenue.

"I am weaponless, old friend." There was infinite pathos in the gentle old voice, so strangely at variance with the eyes that blazed at them. "Have you anything in your lugger that will serve my need?"

"Rifle and shotgun—pistol and knife—they are yours," said Achille eagerly. "They are by my blankets in the bow just under the forward hatch."

He stepped toward the side of his craft.

The little priest came forward.

"A moment, Achille—and you, Pierre," said he, laying hand on arm. "Stay there a moment. I will bring them forth."

OVER the lugger's thwart he stepped, and paused a second by the forward hatch as though in thought.

"Your plan, my son?" came his question to Pierre.

"Ballard returns this way tonight. I have my skiff. I will have weapon. I board his cruiser at the boom and kill him."

There was no threat in the voice. It was simple statement of fact.

Into the hatchway vanished the small figure in the black cassock. A moment later it emerged. In the little priest's arms was Achille's armament, the usual equipment of the luggers whose masters were hunters and trappers as well as oystermen and shrimp trawlers as the seasons varied.

"The day will come when you will thank me for this, Pierre," said he—and with swift motion he cast the weapons far overside. "Have I not your pledge? Have I not told you that the Lord of Heaven and of earth had said: 'Vengeance is Mine! I will repay!'?"

"My pledge—" began Pierre Lafargue bitterly. His voice choked. "Your Lord—" he began again, and again was silent.

And then on their ears smote a sound incongruous in that swamp and bayou wilderness. Three times it shrilled—the telephone bell. The call for the lily-boom instrument from the deep swamp slashings.

Unthinkingly, as he had answered that call many times for many months, Pierre Lafargue stepped to the old-fashioned wall telephone that linked him with the lumber camp by that slender line of a single wire.

Père Duchassois and Achille looked at one another in deep distress.

"Yes," they heard Pierre Lafargue say. And again, "Yes."

A second later he rejoined them.

"There is something to say for your Lord—and mine," he said sharply to the little priest. "I will tell you more when I have filled my orders."

WITHOUT further word he set his old back to the windlass. Creakingly it turned. Out against the heavy mass of the lilies swung the big boom—out and out and out. The entrance to Little Barataria loomed wide in the dying light of day.

To the very limit old Pierre swung the barrier, until from the raft one could see where the far end rested against a group of piling that marked the farthest limit it could go.

Lightly as a youth the old man ran out on the boom, from log to log. In his hand swung a chain and padlock. At the end of the boom he slipped the links under and around the piling, snapped the lock shut, and turning, sped back to the raft.

From the windlass he slipped out the iron bar with which it was turned. Out toward the cove he faced, swung the bar above his head, and sent it to rest in the bayou-bed in the deep water where lay the weapons Father Duchassois had hurled afar.

From his pocket he slipped a tiny object, and tossed it also out into the darkling water.

Then he turned on the pair.

"Yes," he said softly, as one who courteously resumes a conversation that has

been unavoidably interrupted, "there is something to say for your Lord."

His fierce old eyes shone with a light not good for a foe to see.

"They have just telephoned me from the deep swamp camp," said he. "The man who stripped me with his theft the law could never touch—the man who killed my son's daughter as surely as though he put a pistol to her head—I pledged you, Père Duchassois, I would never lift weapon against him. I keep my pledge. But your Lord has struck."

"Tell me, my son," spoke Père Duchassois, again his hand gripping Pierre's arm.

"In the slashings of the cypress he stole from me, your Lord struck him down. He went in a pirogue to find his foreman. The fallers were just chopping through a trunk as that pirogue came around a turn to the slashings. The tree killed the man who was paddling him. Ballard it crushed. But he lives.

"They telephoned me. He is in his cruiser. They are taking him to town. If they can get him to a doctor within the next few hours, he lives. They ordered me to hold the boom open for him. I have followed my orders."

Out upon the night rang the old man's laughter—a sound that man might strive vainly for years to forget.

"They gave the order," he repeated with a rasping chuckle, as that laughter ended. "And I filled it. Look at *them!*"

He waved a hand out on the darkening expanse of Berthoud's Cove.

"Your Lord's lilies!" his voice rang.

And then Père Duchassois understood.

Rustling and creaking they came, pushed up out of the south by the gentle night breeze and the urge of the tide so many miles away.

"The boom is locked, and the key rests at the bottom of the bayou with the windlass-bar," sounded the voice of Pierre Lafargue. "Before the cruiser reaches the cove, Little Barataria will be choked from bank to bank. And he must have his doctor soon, if he live!"

RANK on rank they came, relentless. The sound of their passing was as the whispering of many men. Bulb and stem and leaf and spiky purple bloom of beauty, they marched to the push of wind and tide.

Silently the three upon the raft watched the procession. The tragedy was out of their hands, they knew. They watched the march of the armies of the hyacinths pushing ahead to the music of their eerie creaking. They watched lights gleam far down by the turn of the bayou that opened into Berthoud's Cove.

They watched the little cruiser at top speed charge into the press. They saw its speed slacken. They saw it halt, retreat, and charge again. They saw men in its bow hack feverishly with swamp machete and bayou pike-pole. They saw those men seek to free the propeller from the tangle of gray roots that wound chokingly around it.

On either side, they knew, stretched deep swamp, impassible. The bayou path alone was left. And while the minutes stretched into hours, they saw the cruiser hopelessly enmeshed, advancing by inches where she must leap by scores of yards to save the life of the crushed thing stretched in her cabin.

In silent prayer Father Duchassois knelt upon the raft. Life was life to him, with ever the hope of repentance in the heart of man while life was left.

As he rose from that prayer,—the prayer he knew was fruitless, for he knew the South Coast,—a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"Forgive me that I lost faith," sounded the gentle voice of Pierre Lafargue, very weary now. "I know now that you spoke the truth when you told of your Lord who said: 'Vengeance is Mine! I will repay!' "

"Ah, Pierre—" he began. But the old man's voice ran on.

"I go to Grand Isle with you and Achille in the morning to lay at rest the body of P'tite Celeste."

He fumbled in his pocket, produced an ancient wallet. It was the money he had saved against her next year's schooling.

"Masses for her soul," he said, "and in the honor of the Lord who avenges."

Père Duchassois was silent. He was wise in the ways of men. He knew there were some matters that never can be explained.

And he knew above all that no words of his could matter to Pierre Lafargue as the old man stood there on the raft in the moonlight, looking out at the lights of the stalled cruiser where his foe lay dying, held back from life by the creaking, whispering ranks of those lilies of the Lord.

Every Man a King

A poignant drama wherein something more than steel was forged in a great factory. Mr. Conrad is a new writer whose work shows a real talent.

By LAWRENCE H. CONRAD

FOR three years Dominico had held his own as king of the shop, and now he felt that his kingship was being called into question. He had been no idle monarch, content to sit by and review the display of homage accorded to him. He had actually led all of his subjects in strength, in skill and in nerve; this too in a place where all men must be strong, where all men must possess some measure of skill and where nerve is the one attribute that makes for survival. Most of all did Dominico possess skill. His skill was that of an organist who sits erect upon his bench, his quick, strong fingers drawing out marvelous effects from the four manuals of keys while his feet, now toe, now heel, work none the less rapidly, none the less skillfully upon the pedal-organ.

Dominico's throne was the high seat in the giant manipulator. Thus enthroned, he needed no crown, for the manipulator is a thirty-ton car and is the largest machine of its kind in the country. The business of the manipulator is to grasp the huge ingots of steel as they come from the foundry and to thrust them into the mammoth furnaces where they are heated white. This done, the manipulator takes them out, swings them off to one side, thrusts them under a gigantic steam hammer where half a dozen skilled blacksmiths bring all of their arts to bear upon them, making them up into enormous die-blocks, shafts and heavy machinery.

The two large furnaces face each other squarely across an areaway of brick floor, and between them is the complicated system of steel rails which provides for the movement of the armored car in all directions. Out of the lower armor of the car projects a huge arm some thirty feet long, culminating in a crude iron hand the two fingers of which are capable of being flexed like the claws of a pinching-bug. In addition to this hand or claw, the arm has a universal wrist movement, an elbow movement and a shoulder movement. There is no position into which the hand cannot be put if the operator is skillful enough.

DIRECTLY in front of Dominico's high throne is the rack upon which the blueprints are placed, and the Italian read these as though they were so many sheets of music. On either hand are the three banks of levers and on the floor there are eleven spring buttons. With a thorough command of these and with a touch in hand and foot that was at once delicate and sure, Dominico made himself the heart of this great monster of steel. When he stepped out the car was a cold, lifeless thing and lay along its track like the husk of a dead beetle, but when the king was upon his throne the machine leaped forward, swung to and fro, waved its single brown tentacle, reached for, grasped and manipulated the great masses of steel as though it were a human thing. To the observer who watches from the balcony above, it seems that the machine and not the man in it catches a prize morsel, holds it up to look at it and then thrusts it down the throat of the hungry furnace to be consumed whole, or places it between the teeth of the great steam hammer to be bitten off into chunks as though it were a cake of firm butter.

And now after three years as a part of this machine, Dominico was humbled, all but crushed. For on this day there had come two officials to stand stiffly in their smooth, neat clothes and watch an important piece of work. And on this occasion, "Mac," by right of his foremanship, had climbed up into the manipulator and taken command.

Dominico stood back against the rail which surrounded his platform, and with his proud head bowed just a little, sneered at the whole perfomance. Here was his own beloved instrument thrilling to the touch of another artist, whose interpretation of the notes was always different, always a little less sympathetic than his own. Keenly he felt the outraged eyes of his countrymen upon him from all sides. Not all of his years of undisputed sway would make up for his humiliation in this hour, for this was a piece of work calling for care, for extreme skill, for perfect control —and he, Dominico, king of the blacksmith shop, had been thrust aside. . . . . He might advance his foot just a trifle and touch a button, and the whole ingot would be spoiled. He might jar just one lever with his arm in turning around, and the humiliation he now felt would be transferred to his foreman in an instant. But no! He would be content to wait, and sometime, somewhere the time would come.

The Italian looked down at his well-kept hands and thought about these things. Inside his breast the great strong heart pounded out the blood of shame, which mounted hot and red to his temples. Vainly he tried not to feel the eyes of Vicenzo upon him from below, but the glance was a penetrating one and bored slowly into his brain; he knew that the short, ape-like Sicilian was watching, gloating a little as he stood, sledge in hand, and marveled that the king could be thrust aside so easily. Calabria was being humbled, and so Sicily waxed proud.

NOW, it is a fact that whatever a man does in the shop becomes so much a part of him that he will be found doing similar things in his life outside the shop. The sweeper takes orders from his wife, the punch-press operator kicks his dog or his children, the watchman leads a lazy, shiftless life, and millwrights make electric attachments for things around the house. Dominico, who was used to producing big effects without touching his hands to anything hot or greasy or unclean, ruled over his colony, and the period of his rule dated from the day of his appointment to the job which has always been held by the king of the blacksmith shop.

There were only twelve families in the colony below Water Street, but the Rinelli brothers were seven, all single, and came from Rome, which put the royal stamp upon them; four other families were from Sicily, and these could never be trusted to give full allegiance to the colony, so Dominico's task was a difficult one. He had, however, five lieutenants who worked in the shop with him, and these were just so many levers to him, to be touched delicately and with precision to gain his ends. One of the ends he sought to gain was Paula Rinelli, tall and queenly, with the complexion of her father's olives and the grace of her eldest brother's plaster statues. It is no easy task for even a king to take from an Italian father his only daughter. There must be no question of his kingship, no mutterings among his subjects, no end of loyalty and devotion to the future queen.

Dominico knew this; he was aware of it more poignantly than ever as he stepped down from his platform and crossed the

brick area to the dirty drinking fountain which stands just below the great spinning fly-wheel of the big hammer. As he ducked his head to drink, he caught just the suggestion of a leer upon the face of Sario Rinelli, master smith and youngest of the seven brothers. The water bubbled up against Dominico's lips but he did not drink. His strong fingers were gripped tightly upon the bowl of the fountain, and so he stood, thinking.

There were two, then, who hated: Vicenzo of Sicily, and Sario, own brother to Paula. A single gulp of water caught in his throat as he backed away from the fountain and straightened, and he spat it out in a long stream upon the hot bricks, then watched the steam rise up from it.

Was he not still Dominico, the king? Would he not bear these two devils to the earth with a twitch of his thumb? These two—and maybe even a third one, —that lithe, powerful little Scotchman. After all, was it not Mac who had interfered? Was it not this foreman who had appeared suddenly in the affairs of the Lower Colony and disrupted it, sowing dissension and hate? Sario and Vicenzo,— the other henchmen could take care of them, but Mac—that would be the king's business.

HE stood and watched the Scot work, and from his memory of the blue-print he could see that the foreman was getting into greater and greater difficulty.

The ingot upon the block was square. The problem of the blacksmiths was to make of this a cylinder and then to cut out the core, so as to leave a perfect ring or sleeve of steel. The cylinder is first formed and stood up on end, and then a number of steel cutters, shaped like small arcs of a circle, are placed upon it in their proper position and driven down into it with sledges. These cutters are only a few inches in height, and when they are driven down flush with the surface of the heated ingot, other ones of the same shape are placed on top and hammered, driving the first ones down into the heart of the heated steel. There is no work that is harder than this upon the toiling blacksmiths, for each moment they must climb up and place their cutters accurately upon the glowing steel, and this brings them so close that the terrific heat all but sears over their eyes while they are trying to see perfectly and judge the exact position of the curved cutters. Once begun, the job must be finished before the steel is given another heating. The smiths work in relays, one shift replacing another when exhaustion comes, but always there are two who must remain—the master smith and the foreman. Especially this day must these two remain, for the work was being observed by two men whose large interests were at stake in it.

Dominico frowned a little as he watched the car move jerkily backward and forward. He could feel nothing now but rage, for the ring was slowly, surely moving off center. The smiths too, saw it, but dared not protest. Doggedly they went on with their task, though it must have been apparent to the foreman at his levers that they were cutting out, not a circle, but an egg.

The king moved slowly back toward his car, for he could see that he was needed. The Scotchman was straining every fibre to work the half-cut ingot back into alignment, and the great beads of perspiration were standing out upon his face. Dominico timed himself accurately, and just as the foreman was about to give up in despair, he crossed the areaway in front of the two officials, and mounting the platform with his head thrown up in pride, he brushed the Scot aside. His ears were ringing with the thought of his triumph in that moment, and several distinct impressions flashed across his mind.

He saw first the look which the Scotchman gave him as he took his place upon the bench. In the depth of those sharp black eyes there was infinite relief, mingled with infinite shame. The heart of Dominico bounded within him as he saw the other man humiliated. Quick as a flash his own eyes sought out the other two men, moving like great insects about the block where glowed the tortured mass of steel. He could not make out what was in their eyes, but he saw their tired backs straighten as though even they were relieved to have him back.

RELIEF! Was he giving relief to these three who were waiting only for a moment of weakness on his part in which to strike and throw him forever from his throne? Relief? His white teeth clicked together at the thought. He must give no relief to these, his enemies. And yet he must win!

Critically he studied the poor, mis-

shapen ring, half cut from the ingot before him. He must make it perfect and so prove that none but Dominico can be trusted with particular work. Yet in making it perfect, he must further humiliate the Scotchman, he must make Sario and Vicenzo pay dearly for their hateful looks, he must grind these three to the earth before him, and stand forth again as the unquestioned king.

Whatever he might do now to break the spirits of these three, he knew that he would have no interference from the foreman as long as this block of steel was saved and this piece of work successfully finished. He had read that much in the beaten Scotchman's eyes. He would have perhaps an hour to complete all these plans. By that time the ring must be made and slipped off or the metal would be too cool to work any further.

First then, Sario: The master smith was driving hard with his sledge when suddenly he began to miss the cutter. Again and again he brought his hammer down upon the new-made ring, battering it farther out of shape. He motioned "steady" to Dominico and swung again, missing the cutter by an inch. The king could see him swear. Seizing his levers, he turned the ingot again so as to invite the master smith to another stroke, and as before he shifted it just an inch as the blow fell. Both tormentor and tormented looked toward the foreman, who gave with hand the sign that retired his master blacksmith. Sario turned away, beaten, disgraced and with his job insecure.

Dominico now turned the ingot toward Vicenzo and for ten minutes he played with him. He allowed the Sicilian to come very close to it and with sure clean strokes to rectify the horrible battering which his chief had just given to the iron ring. With visions of Sario's job and Sario's pay before him, the grotesque little figure climbed higher and higher and struck surer and surer every time. But each time he raised himself to strike he was forced to come closer to the hot metal, until his veins were running with fire rather than blood. At last the raised sledge fell back and Vicenzo dropped to his knees for a breath of the cool air near the floor. Cosomo came up from a long rest to take his place, and Vicenzo stumbled off toward the drinking fountain.

Now Cosomo was loyal to the king and had been a strong support to his kingship. Dominico's eyes glinted with a new scheme at sight of his henchman. He turned the ingot square again and, with his eyes upon his clock sounded the "hurry" siren. The block was cooling; two smiths must work now and work rapidly.

Mac took up his sledge and the two began, now Scotchman, now Italian, delivering from opposite sides their mighty blows upon the stubborn cutter. And above them the king, with both hands busy upon the most delicate of his levers, was playing something that soothed his soul as it had never been soothed before. Again and again the foreman missed his stroke. In the blacksmith shop, to miss is the "tired" sign, but the foreman knew that he was missing for another reason. Yet he dared not protest.

THE two officials had drawn in close to the foreman's side at the sounding of the hurry call, and were leaning forward a little to watch the battle against time. Dominico knew that they could not interpret the lesser movements of the ingot and so he went ahead, fearlessly "jarring" it each time the foreman raised his sledge. For Cosomo he held firmly to the four levers and made each stroke count. He kept this up for some minutes.

Again the king timed his foreman's rage and despair, saw the sweat of his face shining red in the light of the glowing ingot, and when the proper moment had arrived, he locked his levers and stepped to the railing of his platform. Leaning forward with all eyes upon him, he motioned for the Scotchman to stand off. The Scotchman was determined not to leave.

Dominico reached back and sounded the second alarm. Ten minutes to work!

At the rail again, he motioned frantically for the foreman to leave off, and finally one of the officials took him by the arm and led him aside.

Now Dominico and Cosomo, these two who understood each other perfectly, worked together silently as few men have ever worked. Cosomo swung his sledge mightily in great circles so fast that it seemed the momentum must carry him off his feet, and the king, his gray eyes narrowed now to thin slits and his jaw set tight as a vise, manipulated the ingot for him so that every stroke fell upon exactly the right spot.

Everyone was tense now. Not a stroke missed.

Rapidly the cutter went down, down, until at last it struck the cold block. Without a second's pause the ingot was turned over, the cutter removed, the ingot turned back to its side and the armored car slid back upon its rails, while Cosomo with a mighty stroke, drove out the heavy "core," and the giant hammer stood mute before the little group of men with a perfect ring of steel held upright between its teeth!

They crowded around with exclamations of wonder like so many heathen around a great iron god with a glowing ring in its nose. There was some measuring with square and scale, all heads nodded approval of the dimensions; and then upon the shoulders of Dominico and Cosomo, two finely manicured hands pressed tight for just a second against two shirts wet with perspiration.

The demeanor of the king was perfectly controlled as he turned his glance in turn upon the three men he had beaten. Upon the foreman his eyes rested last and remained for just a moment while a thrill passed over him, for he realized in that moment that now more than ever before, he was king of the blacksmith shop.

AS he left the factory, the king calculated how much power he might assume under the new order. A heavy rain was falling, so he turned up his coat collar, and gripping his lunch-box tight against his side with one elbow, thrust his hands deep into his pockets. Cosomo could have Sario's job as master smith. Sario must go back to his old job as stroke-man on the big hammer. Dominico turned part way to see who had come up beside him while he was thinking. It was Sario.

"Huh!" Sario grunted in recognition, and then, in broken English: "You make a beeg show today, Dominico."

The king nodded, letting down a stream of water from his greasy hat.

"You come soon to tell Paula?" asked the Roman.

"Tonight," answered Dominico, watching Sario suspiciously from the side. He felt the other man's hand upon his arm and they both stopped walking there in the rain.

"Better stay home tonight," said Sario, grinning fiendishly. "Tonight Cosomo comes to see Paula."

He dropped his hand and turning abruptly, crossed the street and walked on toward the colony.

Dominico swore. As he lurched forward through the driving rain all of his pride of kingship wilted even as his clothes were wilting and he felt limp.

Cosomo coming to see Paula! He ground his teeth. The Roman was again master of the situation.

When Italian young people marry, especially in the colonies, their families, too, are married and become as one family. The two parties must, therefore, have the entire approval of every member of both families. Dominico had never had this, for Sario, Paula's youngest brother, could always be depended upon to cast the dissenting vote. But Cosomo? Surely Sario would welcome him, and now that he was to be the master blacksmith, the elder Rinelli would be proud to have him for a son. The king might crush him, even as he had crushed these others, but in doing so he would destroy forever his own mastery over the shop. After all, what did he win from the Scotchman if not simply the privilege of replacing Sario and putting another man on the job? Should he hesitate now, should he permit a single day to pass without advancing Cosomo, then his victory would count for naught and strife and dissension would again burst forth in his shop and in his colony. Too long had Dominico ruled with an iron hand, now to give up. In front of Orazio's dim fruit-shop the king turned up his baffled face to the rain and felt the great drops beat into it while his whole spirit breathed a vehement curse against heaven.

The houses of his own people sickened him as he strode past them. Crouching, they seemed to be, against the street, with their brows sagging under the rain and their tiny dooryards drenched with mud and slime. Three brown little sons-of-the-devil ran madly past him screaming incoherent delight at the rain and throwing up fountains of mud on all sides. Behold, he was king over this!

WITHIN his own house there was warmth; the odor of soup from the stove nearly overcame him as he entered, and he sank down in his wet clothing to watch old Mary moving about, beyond the smoky lamp. Over this, too, he was king. He sneered bitterly at the thought of it.

For a long time now he sat thinking of this kingship he had fought so hard to maintain. He had this day re-established it by trick, and for the trick he must now

pay the greatest price—Paula. He tried to picture her there across the table from him, but somehow she would not come.

Dreamily he wondered if, after all, this was the place he wanted to call her to. Paula here, in this room, cooking this tomato-paste, cleaning this lamp, stumbling over this worn carpet. He struck his fist into his palm and sprang from his chair suddenly, so that old Mary dropped her long ladle in surprise. No! *Dio mio,* no! It was not here. It was off there somewhere among those vague streets where Mac, the foreman, lived. It was out among the Americans. Americans? Who were they? This Scotchman was one; La Forge, the hammer-man, was one, yet both of these men had come from Europe only a few years ago.

Dominico's pride told him that he was as good as either of these. His experience told him that he could adapt himself to anything that they could. He recalled again his first dreams of possessing Paula and wondered dimly what had become of that palace he had thought to possess, where his woman should be a queen and where they could be happy in the American way.

Throughout the evening meal he looked around him. What? Was Paula a pig that she should share this swine's-nest with him? He ate but little of the soup, for while he ate a genuine fear began to possess him. Suppose it were too late even now? Suppose the mockery of this little kingdom of his should suddenly become apparent to his subjects? Far away in a great blur before his eyes, he saw Paula receding, fading, dancing away.

He bent forward, looking straight through old Mary and her lamp and her damnable soup, far away across the city to those vague streets that he scarcely knew, where every man lived like a real king. A resolution grew upon him. He would be an American! This colony; how silly it was—a feeble straw protesting against the stream of life in this great city, in this great country. He had come to America because of the promise it had held for a life free from the old sordid trickery and hatred and wrangling of Calabria, and then he had made the mistake of rebuilding here on the free soil of America the old *padrone* system of his native land. The kingship—he cared no more for it; Paula—ah, he wanted her!

He recalled how her eyes had danced with joy as she told him about the American music-school, how she had thrilled with pride at her American clothes. Paula, he knew, would like it.

But tonight—Cosomo! The king stirred himself. He must crush Cosomo. He stepped across and lifted a loose board in the floor and inserting his hand into the aperture he drew out a heavy belt. Its broad silver buckle flashed in the dim light, and crouching low so as to conceal his actions from old Mary who remained at the table, he opened it and the long wicked stilleto gleamed in his hand.

"Yet one more stroke for Calabria," he thought. After that he would give over all his life to being an American. He put the knife back into its pocket and unsnapped another part of the belt. In the dim light he could not count the bills that lay before him, but he knew that here was three thousand dollars in the money of America.

Rising, he put the belt around his waist, buckled it, and without a word strode to the door.

THE rain had abated. There was only the after-drip from the few anemic trees upon the street, and the lights from the business district beyond glinted over the wet pavement and came running down in thin, golden rivers over the mud of the colony road.

Dominico walked firmly up the steps of the Rinelli house on the corner, opened the door and stepped inside. The little group around the lamp stood up as he entered. There was only Carlos, the father, Cosomo and Paula. They had been talking about him, he felt sure, for now no one said a word.

He took off his coat and his hat and threw them upon the bench by the door and then came up into the circle. Making a sign with his fingers, he bade them all sit down. Then, leaning across the table, he addressed his rival in their native tongue.

"Low one," he said, "I was your friend; you are a traitor to me. You have asked me to kill you." Sternly the two men looked at each other. There was a long silence. It was Paula who broke it.

"You make me sick with your killing," she said in English. *"Maria grazia!* Am I yet a baby to be told what man is strongest?"

Dominico paid no heed. He went on:

"Cosomo Baronetta," he said fiercely,

"you are a traitor and a coward. Yours is the blood of a dog."

Paula came forward now and leaned upon the table.

"Give me your knife," she said to Dominico. He made no move.

She put her hand upon his arm and pleaded with her eyes. Just now he must be very good to Paula. He looked at old Carlos, who was smoking calmly. The old man nodded his head just a trifle. The knife came out and Paula threw it across the room.

In that instant Cosomo sprang like a tiger. His own blade flashed into his hand and his face was terrible with the hurt of the biting epithets—"Traitor, coward, blood of a dog!"

Dominico's fist made a ball and struck the lamp, sending it hurtling across the room. For a few seconds the room was totally dark and the sounds of a struggle, of heavy breathing and grunts, of overturned chairs, of heavy bodies striking the floor, was all that gave indication of what had occurred. Then a tongue of flame leaped up in the far corner and ran out across the ragged carpet.

Dominico was on top; a blade flashed high in the air—the light flickered and died down again.

Old Carlos waited for the long groan which he had heard many times in his life. To him this was only justice. If one must die, better that it should be Cosomo, who struck at a weaponless man. No groan sounded. The room was still save for heavy breathing. He thought that his daughter had moved from her place. Vainly he tried to see through the dark to where she stood.

DIMLY at first, but with increasing brightness there came light enough to see by. The king lay flat upon Cosomo, holding his throat. The stilletto was sticking upright in the floor beside them. No one dared move. The room grew very light now. Carlos addressed the king.

"You should kill him," he said. "The knife is by your hand."

Dominico took up the knife. There were a few drops of bright blood upon its keen edge, but the point was clean.

"Pig!" he said to Cosomo. "I will let you live. I want no more the vengeance of Italy. Let us forget and be brothers in America."

Paula stood by, nursing her cut fingers in the front of her dress, but no one noticed.

The flames were crackling now and the smoke began to pour out into the room. Carlos already was bringing water. The two men took kettles and began to help, but soon the roar of the fire came to them from two sides, and they knew it had gotten inside the walls. A shout from the porch brought in the whole colony, for the twelve houses were grouped very close together, making almost a solid block of rickety buildings.

Some went to the river with wash-tubs; others brought their rain-water, collected during the deluge of the afternoon. The colony fought as a unit against this danger to the Rinelli house. It was for just such times as this that colonies were organized.

It was Dominico who first thought of the fire-department. The others had no faith in American things. They lived as though they were still in Italy and, giving nothing to this city, they expected nothing.

"Fool," said Carlos, "they will not come. Besides, it will take all my earnings to pay them. Let us keep on. My sons will come soon, and help us."

But Dominico paid no heed. He ran to Water Street and then on and on toward the city. He passed fire-box after fire-box, but these he knew nothing about. He had never thought of using one before and so he had never tried to find out how to work them.

At last he stumbled into a station and told of the fire. The engine was gone before he could finish, and he found himself standing in the street alone.

He thought now of Paula, who had forced the knife out of his hand, thought again of the blood that he had seen upon it, remembered how she had sat white and silent while they fought the fire that was roaring around her. He began to fear for Paula.

The street was filling now with vehicles and with people all moving toward the colony—his colony. He darted forward and ran with all his strength, hatless and coatless through the street. Three houses were burning—the big one was wrapped in flames. Doggedly he beat his way through the fire-guard, striking more than one sledge-hammer blow with his fists, until he came up very close to the porch.

"A girl!" he yelled into the ears of the chief. "A girl in this one—is she out?"

The chief looked at his pad. There

were two crosses for houses number one, but no circle. He shook his head.

"They are getting her now," he shouted back, then made a sign to an officer to remove the king. But Dominico did not wait.

FIRE! What did those men know about fire? For three years he had worked between the two big furnaces and had heard the roar and felt the heat until he loved the fire. He had squinted his eyes and peered down the throats of the furnaces for hours, watching them digest their tons of steel, his heart all the while so much in sympathy with them that he felt his soul was wedded to the spirit of fire.

Through the doorway just outlined by the licking flames, he sprang, and stumbled over some one. His eyes immediately adapted themselves to the fire and the smoke, and he saw that it was a fireman. Grasping him around the middle, he threw him outside, then went on.

The sweat of his shirt was turned to steam in a moment and scalded his back. He fell once in the short space he traversed, and the floor felt burning hot to his hands. Away from the door, the smoke rose up in a great cloud and enveloped him. He did not try to shut it out of his lungs, but breathed it in, knowing from experience that he could get some oxygen out of it and so could last for a little while. His lungs were toughened to the smoke, but he had never encountered so much of it before.

His groping hands touched the chair he was seeking and he felt in it. She was not there!

He dropped to his knees, clutching the smoke, and felt her, like a pile of clothing on the floor. The boiling water was beginning to drip down upon them now from above and far up in the attic; the sounds of falling beams struck panic to his heart. He could not rise now. Above, the smoke grew thicker and thicker and below, the hot floor burned through his wet clothing.

Seizing her hand, he crawled toward the door, dragging her over the hot floor. The roar in his ears matched now the roar in the building so that he felt as though this were some super-blacksmith shop. He ground his teeth. Dominico was a super-blacksmith.

As he crawled, his hand encountered another pile. His fingers recognized a familiar design upon the hot belt-buckle. It was Cosomo. Eagerly he felt for the face so as to tell which way his rival had been moving when the smoke overcame him. The face was nearest him. Cosomo, then, had tried to crawl back for Paula! The sensitive fingers told him something else, however. The face was horribly blistered and that sweeping mustache of Cosomo's was burned off to an irregular stubble. The king drew back his fingers. He might leave this one here; no one would ever know. Besides, he might never get out with even Paula alone. Still, she had saved Cosomo's life once that night at the expense of her own fingers. He would do it!

Dominico took this other hand now, and forced himself over the floor. At the door, the flames licked his face, and burned. He felt his sleeve taking fire.

Rising part way, he closed his eyes and his mouth against the smoke, and rushed at the doorway, to drag the two victims past the flames. He must have staggered, for he struck his head against the casing. The beam snapped, and a shower of sparks and burning wood fell upon him. He was stunned with the pain. This might be hell, he thought. Through his smarting lids, glued tight against his eyes, he could see the fire now as plainly as though his eyes were open.

Again he arched his back and fell out through the door, dragging the two bodies with him. Some one would see him, he thought, and then—then old Mary would take care of Paula until she got well. His mind trailed off into forgetfulness.

But it was not old Mary who cared for her. It was a hospital. And Dominico, king of the colony that had been wiped out by flames, leader of the little group who had dodged the yoke of America so long, lay now and rested in a cot and permitted the Americans to do things for him. He thought of the money in his belt. There would be enough, he knew, to pay the firemen and to pay these women for their care.

He raised up on his elbow. The room was light and clean. They had put a thin white suit upon him, and it smelled clean like the bed. He filled his great lungs with the smell of the clean linen. He was in America at last!

HE would pay for all this, for himself, for Paula, even for Cosomo, and some day he would have a room like this one and

would wear such a suit when he went to bed. The Rinellis should know about this too. Carlos—perhaps he was too old to change, but Sario—yes, he would tell Sario and urge him to buy an American house too.

Suddenly he realized that all the houses in the colony must have been burned. Twelve families, then, would be homeless. What a chance now to prove his kingship! What a work he would have ahead of him, talking to these people, showing them the luxury of American ways, helping them to rent houses in other parts of the city, even buying them clean white suits to sleep in.

He sat up in bed. There was a hurt upon his head and one arm was wrapped neatly. He felt a burn beneath the bandage. Looking across to where the nurse sat quietly watching him, he wondered if she would know about Paula.

"Do you know of the Italian girl, Paula Rinelli?" he asked her, not knowing whether or not to expect an answer.

The nurse smiled.

"The girl you saved?" she asked.

Dominico wondered. He had not thought of that. After all he *did* save Paula. The girl he saved!

"She will get well," the nurse told him, "but she will have a scar on her hand where it was cut. It will be two weeks before she can leave here."

Dominico sat silent again. The scar on her hand—he had forgotten it. He must always be very good to her for that. That much of her hurt was because of him; the other was because of Cosomo—or was it all caused by his visit to the Rinelli house?

"It is all because of me," he told himself. "I will be brothers again with Cosomo."

The memory of that terrible thrill which his sensitive fingers had felt upon Cosomo's face caused him to venture another question.

"The other one," he asked, "the Cosomo Baronnetta?"

She shook her head.

"He was dead when he came here," she said.

Dominico lay down again and closed his eyes. He was glad once more that he had spared the life of Cosomo, glad that Paula had wrested the knife from him there in the dark. He would have to make up to her the pain of those cut fingers. In the thought of her poor little bandaged hand, there came over him a rush of tenderness which he had never felt before. It was Paula who would be with him in all the work that he must do. It was Paula, with her American clothes, who would go about with him and help to scatter the old colony far over the city.

"In America," he said to himself, "every man is a king, and every man's wife is a queen." The smell of cleanliness overcame him and he fell asleep.

HIS sleep was restless, due to the hurt upon his head. He seemed to be back at the levers of the giant manipulator, swinging the car backward and forward, shaping a wonderful, large flywheel. Sario and Vicenzo were there, but it was not in the old relationship of distrust and trickery and hate. They were all working together now, and he, king of them all, helping them. Now and again the Scotchman would climb up onto the platform and speak to him glowingly as in days of yore.

From this pleasant dream his mind turned off again, influenced by the terrible experiences of the night before. He felt himself caught in the great claw of the manipulator and thrust into the furnace. The flames leaped about him, but they did not burn; they were laughing at him and warming him through and through. He seemed to feel some change taking place within him, as though the fire were melting down the old Dominico and preparing him for something new. He felt himself drawn out and swung through space and placed upon the block.

Now Mac came with cutters and shapers and began to work upon him. There was a comfort in all of the heat; there was a gentleness in the touch of the Scot. Dominico lay very quiet and let the foreman have his way.

Minute by minute the little smith worked upon him, changing him, shaping him, giving him a new form. He was proud to feel that he was being made over into something finer and better. . . . .

The king opened his eyes. A doctor was bending over him, just completing a dressing upon his arm.

"How do you feel now?" asked the kindly one.

The Italian stretched himself and looked around.

"As good as yesterday," he said, and grinned into the doctor's face.

"Then you can go home any time that you want to."

Home? He wondered. The little shed with the smoky lamp, with old Mary and the soup—all this was gone. He must stir himself and find a home.

"You will want money?" he asked the doctor.

The other smiled.

"All this is free," he said. "There is no charge for people who are hurt in accidents. The city pays for this."

"And the firemen—who pays for that?"

The doctor laughed a good-natured laugh.

"The city pays for that too," he said.

WHILE Dominico dressed he thought about all this. The city! What a strange, good being the city must be, to pay for firemen and for hospitals and for clean beds. In his heart he felt thankful to it for caring for him, for Paula, for Cosomo who could never know how good the city had been to him. He must do something for the city in return, sometime. He could think of nothing to do for it just then, for his mind was busy with the thought of his day's work.

First, he sought for houses. He must rent twelve of them for all of his people. During the day he visited about twenty, having no way of finding them except by tramping the streets and watching for signs. Of the twenty he rented seven, and marked down for each one, the number and street and the name of the family which should occupy it. Never did king spend a day of more loyal devotion to his subjects than did Dominico on that day. At nightfall he was tired, but his steps turned eagerly in the direction of Water Street.

He found most of the families gathered in the partly burned house of Vicenzo, and he greeted them cheerily.

"Come," he said in broken English, "let us forget about the colony. Let us go away from this rat's-nest and live like kings in this good country. I have found some houses to live in."

The colonists looked at each other in amazement. Was this Dominico who had been their king? Was this the one who had fought for them against the city, against the police, that the traditions of Italy might be maintained? He was gone mad with the heat of the fire, they thought.

But Dominico was not mad. He gave them keys and told them where to go for houses. He helped them to carry their few possessions,—some had saved nothing but a lamp,—and before midnight he had put a roof over all of their heads and given each a floor to sleep on.

ON the following day he found four more houses and the last family had a home. He spent the week helping them to buy furniture, giving money to those who had none, putting in a word for America at every purchase, until at the end of the week he felt satisfied with his work.

On Monday he returned to the shop and had a long hour with his foreman. Mac was surprised to see the change in him. He listened to the story of the fire, of the search for homes, and, penetrating the motive that had possessed his most valuable man, he was proud of him.

"All have American homes now," said Dominico, in conclusion. "Tonight I will find one for Paula, and tomorrow I will find the things for it. Then together we will help these people to live like you Americans live."

The Scot's eyes glowed with enthusiasm.

"There is a house," he suggested, "next door to mine; a new, clean house fit for a king. I would like to have you for a neighbor."

The two men were fast friends from that moment. They worked together and planned together, Mac suggesting many things to make their home truly American. His wife ran over many times during each day, arranging things as they arrived, until the house was ready for its occupants.

With the last of his money Dominico bought a piano—"to make up to her for her cut fingers," and then went to the hospital to see Paula for the first time since the fire. It would be such a surprise for her; he wondered how he would tell her about it.

The Scotchman's busy little wife had taken care of that. Three times she had called at the hospital to see "her new neighbor" and so when Dominico arrived he found Paula fairly standing upon her toes in eagerness and expectation.

The old brusqueness of the king was gone now, and the tenderness of love swept across his heart. Nurses and doctors turned aside and left them.

Dominico took out the paper and putting his finger upon the American eagle at the top, he smiled tenderly.

"And a real American wedding-license," he said.

Big Eye

The dramatic life-story of a great bighorn ram, told by a man who knows them well, the author of "Pat," "The Voice," "The Captured Rainbow" and other memorable stories of the wilds.

By JOE MILLS

THE old ram lay upon the ledge and looked down at the world below. Far out across the dim valleys, the sun was burning its way above the horizon. Deep down in the cañons the night still lingered. Overhead, and high among the jumbled peaks, the dawn was rose-red. From the glacier above came the crash of breaking ice—then echoes among the cliffs that went up and up, growing fainter and farther. Little streams pulsed through dark forests and joined the river in the cañon, from which came the muffled thunder of the waterfall as it chugged and sobbed and roared endlessly between the towering cliffs.

All this wild world was familiar to Big Eye. He knew the difference between the fall of rocks and breaking glacier ice. And he knew that the thunder that reverberated from peak to peak was different from the powder blasts that crashed between cañon walls below. The flare of the sunrise he did not fear—but the flame of a night fire in the valley filled him with dread. For he associated these feeble distant fires with the presence of men, whom he feared more than all his other enemies.

Shadowy forms moved in the valley, faint and elusive and far away. But for all their flitting vagueness, the watcher of the heights focused his sharp eyes upon them. For an hour, then, the old ram did not move, but stood like a statue upon the ledge. Lately had come smoke-spirals, night-fires, and distant moving specks that Big Eye recognized as enemies. Throughout a tumultuous life the wary old sheep had led his band to safety on the heights. But now, wherever he retreated, he could see the settlers encroaching into the narrow mountain valleys. No more would he go down for the first shoots of green grass when spring came tardily creeping up the heights.

BIG EYE had inherited, thirty years before, the rich experience of his ancestors. And he had not squandered his inheritance. The more he used it, the better it became. Hunters of the heights credited the ram with supernatural power. Many times, with their glasses, they had marked

the spot where the bighorn band, led by the old ram, was feeding. And then, after hours of patient, upward toil, as they crept within rifle-range, they had lifted their heads among the rocks and found that the sheep had fled. "The old ram knows when there's a gun in the region," the hunters complained.

Out on the plains, which showed dimly in the distance, the buffalo herds had long ago been exterminated. And down in the lower foothills the bands of elk and deer were dwindling before the hordes of hunters. The Indians moved to the upper ends of the narrow valleys, and more and more took toll of the bighorn sheep that ranged high among the crags.

Big Eye, the great ram, the Indians named because they said his eyes were larger than those of other sheep—so large, in fact, that he could sight their hunters around the corners, and over the peaks, and through the rude rock blinds which they set up beside the well-worn sheep-trails.

DOWN through the years had come usurpers whom Big Eye had fought for the leadership of his band. And now he had grown old. Lately his legs wobbled uncertainly; and several times he'd pitched headlong among the rocks. He understood many things but had never before encountered this strange new enemy—age. He had been splendidly equipped for life. His soft colors matched and blended with those of his rocky surroundings. When he was a little wabbly lamb his camouflage color had concealed him from the eagles that hovered about the heights. And once when a hunter had wounded him deeply, he had hid away among the boulders, remaining motionless while the hunter stalked past within a few yards. His feet had never failed him. They were like loadstone, clinging tenaciously to the smallest roughness of the rocks and holding upon almost perpendicular faces where no other footed thing dared tread. His eyes of black and gold were endowed with telescopic power. And he stood now, upon the top of the cliff, searching the dim cañons, scanning the slopes. He was well versed in the danger-signals of the wild folk. A fox stealing silently to cover, or the quick flight of startled birds, were wireless messages of danger to the watcher of the heights.

Instinct and experience had taught Big Eye many things. He always expected danger. And he had learned how to avert it—when to disappear among the rocks, or when to lead his band to the great peaks. But age was upon him. And lately had come a young ram who had overthrown him and driven him from the flock.

AS he stood now, half asleep in the glorious sunshine, he suddenly jerked his head upward as though the finch that was flitting about the rocks were an eagle of his youth waiting to drop like a thunderbolt from the sky. And he watched the edge of the woods as though expecting the wolves that had lurked there until his band of sheep were too far from the cliffs to escape. He stared off across the cañons at the saw-tooth peaks, dim with distance, whither wanderlust had often called him.

To the heights there came one enemy that was more persistent than all the rest, and that took more toll than men with guns. This—the mountain lion. The men with guns killed only the rams with the wonderful heads. But the lion was a game-hog that killed ruthlessly, without discretion. He struck down the weak and aged, taking heavy toll whenever he came—killing not only for food, but for the joy of killing.

When men with guns appeared, and persisted in the region, Big Eye led his band of sheep to another range, taking refuge among the great peaks of the Continental Divide where he found safety. But no matter where he led the band, a mountain lion at length discovered their retreat. Usually the watchfulness of the sheep, with their sharp eyes, enabled them to elude the lion. Sometimes a vagrant eddy of wind would carry the warning scent of the beast to the sheep band. And often it was the alarm of birds that warned them of the tawny killer's presence.

Wherever he had led his band, Big Eye had been alert for danger. He had fought fearlessly the usurpers that had dared challenge for his harem. And hours on end, while the band was feeding about the crags, he would pose atop some cliff and stand like a statue silhoueted against the sky. His great horns curved about his head in corrugated spirals. Life had made him into a magnificent specimen. And now, while his confidence was high, his courage undaunted, grim tragedy had appeared to stalk him.

OCTOBER was turning the aspen leaves, and the valleys were glinting with gold. Already the frosts had come to the heights. It was out of a clear sky that the great ram's tragedy had come. It was the one enemy with which he had not had experience—and he was too proud, even yet, to admit defeat. Abruptly he quitted the lookout post he'd held since the early dawn, and circled the ridge until he was directly above the spot where a scattered band of sheep was feeding. In the midst of the flock, upon a huge granite slab, was a young ram proudly posing. The day before, and the day before that, this young ram had vanquished Big Eye as the leader of the band. For hours they had battled upon the mountain-top, the band of ewes watching the conflict—the victor would be their lord. At first the old ram had sent the upstart spinning by the force of his charges, for his enormous horns and heavy head had battered many opponents before. Besides, the old ram was well versed in the ways of fighting. But the young ram had the one great asset that Big Eye had lost—youth was on his side. At length the battle had turned. The fighting rams rested, then flung together again. So on for hours they fought. And at length, just as the sun sank to glory in a bed of rose-red clouds, the young ram had overthrown the old patriarch and had proudly led his harem away.

THE early snows found Big Eye wandering along among the cliffs. Age had sapped his strength. No longer could he run away to distant peaks when danger threatened. He had grown gaunt through the late summer—at the time, too, when other sheep were putting on fat for the long winter. His teeth were scraggly and broken, and he was slowly starving in the midst of plenty.

The snow came now, and buried all the grass of the lower ridges. Above the cliffs, where the wind roared among the peaks, Big Eye sought a windswept spot where the dried grass was uncovered. Daily he battled his way from the cliff to the feeding ground, and at night returned to the safety of the ledges.

The deer and the elk had deserted the heights and sought lower levels for the winter. The grouse had migrated to timberline. Snow-white ptarmigan were lost among the drifts. Then it was that an old mountain lion sought the cliffs as a forlorn hope. Always before he had followed the elk and the deer to lower levels. But now there were men and dogs in the valleys, and they had driven him from his usual hunting-grounds. He was too old, and too big a coward, to fight the dogs. He was too feeble, moreover, to kill enough to sustain his strength. His sides were shrunken. His eyes were no longer baleful; instead, a haunted look had come into them.

BIG EYE caught a vagrant scent and got stiffly to his feet. He faced the wind alertly. At length he turned and made his way farther along the face of the cliff. Of late his feet had lost their sureness; no longer did they cling to the slippery rocks. But his eyes still burned with black and gold—and with hate for the mountain lion. He shook his huge head menacingly, and waited.

Minutes later the lion padded softly to the spot where the ram had lain. Here he paused, smelling hungrily at the place. At length he went on, following the way the ram had retreated. As far back as he could remember, the lion had known the scent of this ram. Often in the years that had passed had he stalked this wary sheep. A score of times he had struck down a member of the ram's band, but never a time had he touched the sagacious old leader. He had visited the heights at intervals to pick off the stragglers, and to end the lives of old sheep that could no longer keep up with the band. It is the law of the land that wild things must die as soon as they grow old. This is the reason there are no very old and decrepit sheep wandering the heights.

The lion paused and sampled the air. Somewhere ahead the ram was hiding in a rock-cranny. The lion's nose would guide him unerringly. The camouflage color of the sheep was useless against the lion's nose; the huge horns of the ram would avail little against an enemy that struck from behind and gave no warning of his coming.

WHERE the ledge sloped sharply downward and there seemed almost no footing at all, the ram paused. Slowly he had turned to await the creeping death which his nose warned him was approaching. He froze at attention. His body swayed uncertainly from side to side; he

lifted his mighty head jerkily, like a palsied old man.

The lion sought the shelf above the ram and crept cautiously forward. At length he was directly over the bighorn. He moved his feet stealthily until his terrible claws found cracks that would give him firm footing. And then, when the last detail of the stalk was complete, and he was ready to launch himself down upon the ram like a thunderbolt, he paused. If he struck here, both would tumble off the ledge to the rocks a thousand feet below. Almost without perceptible movement the lion stretched out upon the shelf to wait. Motionless he lay; his nose would inform him of the ram's every movement.

BIG EYE knew of the lurking danger, for he had scented the lion's presence, and his sharp eyes were alert to pick out a tawny spot among the rocks. But the ram did not venture from the face of the cliff. Patiently he worked his way back and forth along the ledges and cropped at the bunches of grass that clung to the clefts in the rock. And always, somewhere upon the face of the cliff above, lingered the lion. Often Big Eye sighted the slinking form and raced away as fast as his weary legs could carry him. And again, when he caught only a faint scent of the lion, he'd lift his head and stamp angrily upon the rock.

So the siege went on. Days and days it continued. Neither of the two had lost his cunning. Both had infinite patience. Each loved life. The old ram fared best, for the grass that grew in the clefts was sweet—only he had not the teeth to crop it. The lion fared frugally upon the mice he caught, or the few pack-rats he surprised.

Many times daily the killer crept to a hiding-place above where the old ram fed. And times without number the wary old sheep slipped away a moment before the lion was in position to attack. There were days when the snow came piling pitilessly down, trapping them upon the ledges, and shutting them off from the rest of the world. Sometimes the old ram sought out the bare, wind-swept feeding-ground, but the deep snow beyond always forced him to return to the ledge of the cliff for shelter. And the lion, wise with years of hunting, waited patiently for the bighorn to return by the trail he'd broken above the cliff. But the old ram craftily returned by a new route, and avoided the lurking danger that waited on his trail.

The lion grew desperate. Hunger was gnawing at his vitals. He was weak and thin and willing to run the risk of a kill upon the ledge. Fate had flung them together and locked them tight upon the bosom of the mountain. Both were in desperate straits. Each was alert; they staked their lives upon their cunning. Daily they profited by experience gained through a lifetime. But the end was inevitable. . . . .

The sunset flared like wild-fire in the western sky. In the valley below, the night-fires were glowing in the gathering gloom. The barking of dogs came up faintly from the depths. Overhead the wind screeched like a lost soul, and sheets of flying snow shrouded the peaks. The glacier was buried beneath a white world. There was silence in the cañons, for the streams no longer murmured.

From ten feet above the ram the lion shot downward. Big Eye rasped the ledge sharply with his hoofs and made a desperate lunge forward to escape the hurtling body. There was a split second of suspense—tense, terrible. Then with bared fangs and outstretched claws the lion descended straight at the old ram. And the ram, sensing instantly that he could not escape, flung half around and launched upward viciously with his battering head. He caught the lion in mid-air and half-turned the descending body. But the lion's claws bit deep into the ram's shrunken sides, and the shock of the impack dislodged the loadstone feet. For an instant they poised there upon the brink of the abyss. Then the ram's feet lost their hold and slipped beyond the edge. They toppled outward, away from the wall, and plunged downward, together, whirling over and over as they fell.

"The One-man Dog," another fine story by Joe Mills, will appear in an early issue. It will richly reward its readers.

A complete novelette by the distinguished author of "Lou-Lou," "Sixteen Miles," "The Brazen Peacock," "The Second Life of M. the Devil" and many other well-remembered Blue Book Magazine stories.

Brome's Luck

CHAPTER I

SAIGON was all dark and wet and miserable. This city of divers iniquities and weary-eyed men, this gilt-and-stucco imitation of Paris set amid steamy jungles, mangrove swamps and rice paddies, thrives mostly at night; but tonight was rainy; the pale lost lilies of France were draggled in mud; and Saigon was desolate.

The man who dragged himself out of the water, falling exhausted on the embankment, could not have selected a better spot to shun observation. He was midway between two electric lights, and all this district of the city was deserted. Behind him the Arroyo Chinois, the creek which flows into the Saigon River, was dark save for the riding-lights of two ships. The Quai de la Belgique, on which he lay, was empty obscurity. A late tramcar came rattling back from Cholon, but its lights did not even touch Brome. Across the way, the Bureau of Immigration was closed and dark. This part of Saigon, below the railroad and near the slaughterhouse, was not at any time a select quarter, but now it was positively menacing. Not that George Brome cared a whit; he knew well enough where he was. After a moment he rolled over, repressed a groan of pain and dizzily sat up, one hand to his head. He removed the soggy officer's cap and cast it aside, and tenderly felt the scalp. His immersion had washed away all traces of blood, but his face was gray and drawn in lines of frightful suffering. He needed not to feel the two-inch cut over his ear to know how close to death he had passed.

"Cut the skin and raised a bump—fine!" he muttered. "Shows it didn't hurt the bone. My brains, such as they are, seem safe. They thought I was done for, and chucked me into the creek. Wonder how long ago they doped me? Well, I expect we'd better mosey right along, Mr. Chief Officer. We'll have a settlement with one of those birds before he goes to bed."

HE was horribly weak. After two efforts he gained his feet, then staggered across to the obscurity of the buildings at the end of the Rue Marchaise. There, with a sigh, he limply sat down on the curb

Adventure in its most exciting form is Mr. Bedford-Jones' theme in this thrilling drama of the Indo-China coast; and none knows better than he how to convey to you the thrills of hazard and the glow of triumph.

By

H. Bedford-Jones

and explored the ragged, water-soaked garments which had been thrust upon his unconscious body. The pockets were empty. The precious oilskin bag was gone from about his neck—the little pouch that held his papers, his chief-mate's certificate, everything that identified him. His discharge-book, which mattered less, was gone. All that proved him to be George Brome, United States citizen, was vanished.

Worse, by the emptiness of his belly he suspected that at least twenty-four hours had elapsed since they had doped him in the Reine Sadinet; therefore the *Trepang* had sailed. This was a shrewd blow. Here in Cochin China, and particularly in Saigon, berths were scarce for Americans. Further, that berth had been a good one, hard to get, and the consul had been forced to guarantee him heavily. If only he had not gone back to that cursed Reine Sadinet to get his clothes! If only he had gone direct to the ship and had sent after his possessions!

"And," he added grimly, "if only I hadn't met Bill Cochrane and his French friends in there! Bill did it, or had that rascally proprietor do it. Well, I'll settle with the last-named quick enough! I heard him tell Cochrane, afterward, that they'd have to put me out of the way for keeps, since he was afraid of the police. I'll give him something better to be afraid of!"

BROME had met Cochrane in the wine-shop under the inn: a brawny, bronzed seaman who had two agile little Frenchmen in tow. A glass of wine while Brome's bag was being fetched, and dim memories of what followed; that was all. It was enough for George Brome to chart a course by, however, and with a curt laugh he rose.

He went unsteadily up the street toward the seamen's haven which called itself the Reine Sadinet; a tall figure, pausing now and then to rest, yet in mien and general aspect expressing something singularly indomitable. Another man might have gone on to the Dutch consulate, only a short distance along the quay, and have telephoned his own consul; but not George Brome. He knew the city; he spoke the language; he was a man accustomed to

depend on himself in emergencies. Also there were reasons why he should keep this matter quiet. With luck, he thought, he could manage his own affair.

A THIN drizzle of rain was falling, so that his soaked appearance mattered naught. He was familiar with the Reine Sadinet, having spent a fortnight there—the place was cheap and fairly clean. Fortunately the consul was keeping most of his money, no inconsiderable sum. Brome had come up here from Singapore on the trail of an investment, from which the consul had dissuaded him; then he had settled down to get a suitable berth. And now—to be cheated out of a chance in a thousand to make his everlasting fortune!

Reprisals were certainly demanded, reprisals in kind. And already he was suspecting the truth about Bill Cochrane.

Now, as he came close to the dirty front window of the Reine Sadinet wineshop, Brome chuckled grimly and pulled the lank wet brown hair down over his brow. A glance through the window showed that the place was empty save for the proprietor, who leaned over the cigar-counter, absorbed in a newspaper, a brandy bottle at his elbow.

Brome carefully opened the door, not quite far enough to ring the tinkling bell, and without a sound edged himself through. His bare feet—for his shoes were gone—made no noise on the sanded floor. The man hunched over the counter heard nothing. Not until Brome came so close that he shadowed the light, did the Frenchman look up. Then his eyes widened. A paralysis of horror seized him, for Brome's face was ghastly enough to be that of a drowned man. The Frenchman convulsively crossed himself, shrank back terrified, muttered a low word.

"Dead! A dead man—"

"Come to life," said Brome, and snatched up the brandy-bottle. "You will drug me, eh?"

He struck out, hard enough to shatter the bottle. The Frenchman staggered, then sank from sight. Brome caught up the newspaper, went to the front window, placed the paper against the glass, then pulled the curtain. He locked the door. This done, he went into the back room and kitchen, where he seized what food he could find, and returned to the front room.

There, with cheese and bread and a bottle of wine, he fought hunger and weakness in the most thorough manner possible. So far, luck was with him, but he had only begun. The clock and the newspaper told him that he had been adrift since four the previous afternoon; it was now ten at night. Thirty hours wiped out! Then the *Trepang* had certainly gone without him. But—had Bill Cochrane gone with her?

"Even though the consul knows me, the loss of my papers will be a bad business in this country," reflected Brome. He explored for a cigar and appropriated a box. "The consul can handle the police, but this is no police job. If things are as I suspect, there's the devil to pay and no pitch hot. No, I've simply got to count the consul out of it; this whole thing is beyond the law. Yet, if I go to old Sun Tock, make a clean breast of it, and get sent down the coast, the old rascal will raise hell with me. Looks to me as though it were a one-man game, with yours truly playing it to a finish! Sun Tock wants the whole matter kept secret, so it's up to me to turn the trick myself. Ah, there's the swine stirring now!"

A GROAN sounded, and another—then a scuffle of feet as the unfortunate Frenchman came erect. He found Brome facing him, empty wine-bottle in hand, and he shrank back.

"It's no dream," said Brome grimly. "There's a gendarme outside now, and my consul will be here presently. When I tell the police my story, you'll go to Noumea on a free trip. Nice prospect, eh?"

His one fear had been that the proprietor would attempt to knife him, but he dismissed it at once. The Frenchman was not a brave soul at all, and that first blow had knocked the fight out of him. A ghost was bad enough, but a live dead man was worse; and the very name of the horrible penal colony sent a shiver down his back. Perhaps he had been there. A greenish pallor crept across his countenance.

"Ah, monsieur, you will ruin me—I shall kill myself—"

"Good job if you do," said Brome. "No fight left in you, eh? Well, don't tell me any lies, make good my losses, and I may let you off light. No talk, now! I heard the whole thing. You did the job, and you can pay for it. First, I had eighty francs in my clothes. Hand them over out of the cash-drawer, and another eighty to help me get a new outfit. No protests, or down you go!"

The wretched man cringed as Brome lifted the bottle menacingly.

"I shall have to get it from above, monsieur—"

"Go get it, then," said Brome. "And if you haven't looted it already, get my bag out of my room. Move fast, or I'll call in that gendarme!"

Panic upon him, the Frenchman fairly fled from the wineshop. Brome went back to the table, picked up his cigar again, and emptied the wine bottle. Five minutes afterward the proprietor returned, some bank-notes in one hand and Brome's bag in the other.

"See if you've left enough duds to clothe me decently."

To his satisfaction, Brome found his spare clothes untouched, and presently he was dressed and feeling himself again. Taking another cigar and lighting it, he eyed the Frenchman reflectively.

"Now, shall I call in that gendarme, or will you talk?"

"Monsieur, I will say whatever you desire."

"Nope! You say the truth. Did Cochrane take my place and go aboard the *Trepang?*"

"Yes—"

"All right. What's the game?"

"I—I do not know—"

"You lie!" snapped Brome. "You know all about it. You know that Sun Tock and a couple more Chinese merchants chartered that steamer to go down the coast. You know that every man on her was a white man, except the black-gang, and they were picked coolies. You know all about the silk-junk that was wrecked around the corner of Point Kamao, in the Gulf of Siam. You know the whole thing, you liar! Who's behind Cochrane?"

"I do not know, monsieur!" wailed the other. "They are French; that is all I know. It was M. Cochrane who employed me to—"

"To feed me the knockout drops, eh? Well, here's what I know." Brome's capable gaze narrowed. "I know there's a gang out after that junk and its cargo. I know you and Cochrane and others are in on the game. Cochrane shipped in my place, because no one aboard the *Trepang* knew me by sight, and he could get away with it safely. Now, my friend, what do you suggest that we do—as a matter of reparation, let us say, for this cut on the head?"

MORTAL terror was upon the Frenchman. "Mercy!" he cried, in a sweat of fear. "You promised—"

"Mercy?" Brome laughed harshly. "How many men will die because of your work, dog that you are? Still, it is true that Sun Tock wants this affair kept secret; therefore I had better dismiss the gendarme."

The Frenchman brightened at this. Brome continued thoughtfully:

"On the other hand, when I go to Sun Tock with my story, he may or may not send me on to rejoin the ship. He will, however, most certainly see to it that friends of his pay you a visit."

A sharp cry jerked from the other man, who knew only too well what to expect from such a visit, from the vengeance of so wealthy a Chinese merchant as Sun Tock. Brome, not heeding him, rose and selected a five-franc note from those in his pocket. He went to the door, unlocked it, stepped outside and raised his voice slightly.

"Will you accept this for your trouble? There is no occasion to take any action at present. Good night, and many thanks to you."

He came back inside, having thus apparently dismissed the non-existent gendarme, and addressed the terrified innkeeper.

"Now, my friend, you shall break even on this affair. I comprehend perfectly that you are familiar with the local underworld. First, you shall provide me with an automatic, with two extra clips of cartridges. Eh?"

"But yes, monsieur."

"Then with this automatic against the small of your back, you shall lead me to a boat—not a sampan, but a whaleboat or small sloop, a sailing craft which I can handle alone. You shall summon friends. You shall see to it that they put aboard this boat, within the next half-hour, supplies of food and water, and a dozen bottles of your best wine. The boat will balance the loss of my position aboard the ship. The automatic will balance this cut on the head. The supplies will balance my immersion in the Arroyo Chinois. On these conditions, I shall depart immediately, the sooner the better, and neither the gendarmes, Sun Tock nor the consul shall be brought into the case at all. I think this is tolerably merciful. Speak quickly! Yes or no?"

"Yes!" cried the unfortunate proprietor

with eagerness. "Yes, monsieur! It can be done now, at once, this very moment!"

"Then get busy," said Brome. "And carry my bag to the boat."

CHAPTER II

BEING entirely familiar with the peculiar port conditions, George Brome found himself leaving town in a well-found whaleboat, with a favoring breeze, at just the right time of night to preclude his meeting any up-bound vessels—to be precise, on the ebb tide. A Government steamer, being exempt from the regulations forbidding any night arrivals, had come up on the last of the flood and was turning for berth above the Arroyo de l'Avalanche in the singular fashion necessary—namely, with her bows rammed into the soft mud of the left bank while one engine went ahead and the current swung her stern around.

None of these troubles worried Brome; nor did his small craft bear any light; and in ten minutes Saigon was only a sky-glimmering memory behind him as he headed down to the main river. Since this irregular cruise of his was certain to be halted if discovered, it was necessary that he get below the Fa-mi Point signal station as quickly as possible, for he could get out past Cape St. James well enough by daylight. Accordingly, Brome gave all his attention to the work in hand, making the most of the breeze and keeping to the center of the narrow channel. It was long past midnight when, with all clear behind, he sighted the fixed red light that marked the junction of the Saigon with the Donnai River, and swept on into the main channel. Luck served him, for the wind was with him and was picking up, while the dark and rainy night completely hid him from view. Four miles farther, and he was past the danger zone without discovery. Now there was a clear run down the river, and he did not have to regard the beacons warning of banks and mud-shoals, for the light whaleboat could float in a thimble. Not knowing the Soirap Channel, he kept to the main river.

Daybreak found him in huge glee, despite the weather. Sheets of rain swept the river steadily, and made it practically certain that he would get past Coconut Bay and the cape without anyone taking the trouble to overhaul him. Such, indeed, proved to be the case. Soaked and weary, but triumphant, he passed a big oil tramp as she was whistling for a pilot at noon, saw the land fade out behind, and knew that he had won the first round of his battle.

Battle it was, however. By mid-afternoon the rain had ceased, as had the breeze, and the whaleboat was rocking in a flat calm ten miles off the blue coast. Knowing that he had a good hundred miles to go before rounding Kamao Point into the gulf, Brome curled up and went to sleep.

A BOOK might have been written about that down-river passage from Saigon to the sea; yet Brome knew well enough that this was only the prelude. Desperate as seemed the attempt to sail a small boat down the coast and up into the gulf, it must be done—and then the game would barely be opened. The stakes were high, and were piled on a lonely rock in the Gulf of Siam for any man's taking; here was no question of underwriters and law, but a problem of primitive loot, to be solved by the strongest or the craftiest looter.

Sun Tock and his associates were generous. The silk was theirs by right, if they could get it, and a junk-cargo of the finest Wusih silk, in convenient eighty-catty bales, would run into the hundreds of thousands—and would be more readily disposed of than gold, which leads to impertinent questions on the part of port authorities. The *Trepang* was to receive twenty per cent of the gross value, which divided among officers and men meant a very tidy sum for the chief mate.

Thus, George Brome had some incentive to take desperate chances, as much for his own sake as for that of Sun Tock & Company. Bill Cochrane, aboard the *Trepang* and passing himself off for Brome, had similar but much greater incentives—for Cochrane and his French friends wanted one hundred per cent of that silk and meant to have it. Bill Cochrane had installed himself in a position of strategic value. If his friends sent some kind of a craft to make a fight for the loot, Bill Cochrane would be right on hand to help them.

"Inside job, right!" muttered Brome, as he blinked sleepily in the sunlight and eased himself to the slow rocking of the boat. "Chances are, they'll run the silk

into some Siamese port and be safe. They wont figure on me showing up at all, naturally. The devil of it is, nobody aboard the *Trepang* knows me—and how'll they know I'm George Brome?"

On this query he fell asleep, and the warm afternoon sun dried him as he lay.

HE wakened at sunset, to find a good breeze stealing out of the north, and after a bite to eat and drink he hoisted sail and got on his way. Now, it is quite possible for one man to steer and sail a whaleboat, ballasted only with rainwater, but it is one of those things that are not done for the pleasure thereof—particularly with the wind abaft. Never having essayed the job heretofore, Brome spent an hour cursing the boat; then he was aware of her ways and began to enjoy himself hugely. The pain of his hurt scalp had lessened; the night was warm and starry; and any man would thrill to the sweep and rush of a boat under sail as the great seas lift her in surging swoops toward the horizon—particularly if her keeping afloat depends upon his own cunning of arm and brain.

Having no compass, Brome held to the southwest by the stars, rushing on hour after hour across empty seas, ever climbing and climbing the dark bowl of the ocean as though surging to reach the stars beyond. And, while he swung the long oar and fought weariness with a song, there came into his mind the explanation of Cochrane's activity.

Beyond a doubt, the headquarters of the enemy had not been in Saigon, but in some town on the farther side of the peninsula—Hong-chong or Hatien, perhaps. Some Frenchman there had learned about the wreck of Sun Tock's silk junk and had wired Saigon for assistance; Cochrane had been selected as agent, had not hesitated to murder Brome, and was now en route to the scene of action. Meanwhile, the rest of the gang in Hong-chong were sending a ship to the wreck—perhaps a junk, since steamers would be difficult to obtain. That might explain a lot.

"That's why Cochrane took such chances," reflected Brome cheerfully. "His job was to delay the *Trepang* if he could; if not, then to lend the other rascals a hand when they showed up and started a row! Yep, they must have been unable to get anything except a junk. It's a blamed good thing that I put in some time studying a chart of the gulf! If the wind holds, I ought to get up there about tomorrow night—no, I'll have to get snatches of sleep. Say day after tomorrow, in the morning. Ought to get there before daylight if possible and spy out the situation before I show myself. Well, we'll see about it!"

His estimate of the boat's speed was fairly accurate. Dawn was at hand when, over the starboard bow, he made out the white flash of the Obi light. Since the light had an elevation of a thousand feet and was visible about forty miles from a ship's deck, he figured that his more limited horizon would bring it twenty miles away; and Kamao Point was twelve miles beyond it. Correcting his course, he held on until the wind began to fail at dawn, then hauled in his sail and composed himself for a two-hour sleep, which he needed.

Waking to the hot morning sunlight, he found the boat drifting five miles off the high mass of Obi Island. After breakfasting, Brome hoisted sail and swung west and north for the Point. He rounded this closely, hauled in past the hundreds of fishing stakes that studded the shallows, and sighted a dozen native fishing boats at work. He passed within hailing distance of them, waved his arm, and the natives stared blankly as he swept by them and headed across the wide estuary of the Kamao River. Heading in toward the low and marshy coast beyond, he drove on to the northward. Except for the smoke of a steamer to seaward and a Singapore junk putting in for the Ongdok River, the coast was now deserted. Brome saw little more of it, for it trended away from him as he bore to the north and a little west, steering for Tammassu Island by his memory of the chart.

THE wind became light and variable, and dropped entirely after noon. Brome rigged up a tarpaulin to shelter himself from the burning sun, and stretched out comfortably with one of the Reine Sadinet cigars. He lay sprawled beneath the thwarts in the bottom of the whaleboat, idly smoking and watching the mast roll across the sky. The cigar finished, he was dozing lazily when a sound reached him—a sound like the thud of oar on gunnel. He sat up, staring.

A native boat, four fishermen at the oars, was approaching him and was only fifty feet distant. At sight of Brome the

four natives ceased work, staring at him and talking among themselves. Brome grinned and waved his arm, perceiving that they had thought the boat adrift and empty.

After a moment two of them resumed the oars, the other two coming into the high prow and watching Brome. One hailed him, in a language unknown, and he could only wave his arm in reply and test them in French, which they seemed not to understand. Not until the fisher-boat was within ten feet and circling to come alongside, did the least thought of danger come to Brome—and then it came in a flash of steel, as one of the standing natives lifted his arm and flung a knife.

Then things happened more swiftly than words.

The knife, which Brome evaded only by a miracle of agility, sang across his face and thudded into the side of the whaleboat beyond him, going clear through the thin sheathing to the hilt and sticking there. The natives yelled; the oarsmen gave way; and as the boat plunged forward the second man hurled his knife.

His aim was spoiled, however, and the blade went wild; for Brome shot him in the act, and with a second bullet dropped the first thrower. The two men pitched backward into their craft, almost upsetting the frail boat and sending it askew in its course. Instead of laying the whaleboat aboard, it drifted past the bows, the two rowers uttering shrill cries for mercy.

BROME rose and gestured them to be off. They understood, and bent to their oars instantly, the two dead men at their feet. Brome gazed after them as they rowed toward land.

"Poor devils!" he said, putting away the automatic. "They thought they had found something soft, and on seeing me didn't have the guts to resist temptation. Took me for a shipwrecked man, evidently —easy pickings! Well, I'm still here. Hello—there's a breeze coming up!"

He went forward, got his canvas up, and bore off to the northward again. Then he made a disquieting discovery. The knife that had gone through the boat, haft inside, was on the lee side with the blade projecting under water; the pressure caused the long haft to bear down on the slit through the sheathing, letting in water and threatening to widen the hole at any instant.

Brome let go the halliards and settled down to work. Having little to do with, he managed to withdraw the blade and fill the hole with a stuffing of tarpaulin; but this was unbacked and gave way almost at once to the pressure of water. Finding a coil of spare line, he was forced to sling the tarpaulin overside to cover the hole, then stuff it afresh, after which he took up his way again. The result was indifferent, for the damage being on the lee side was subjected to constant pressure with a resulting slow and steady leak.

"Can't be helped," reflected Brome at last, "and I wont sink before morning, anyhow! So let her go."

He drove on, before a freshening breeze. Ahead of him lay a poorly charted and little known section of coast, a graveyard of ships, with reefs, and pinnacle rocks and shoals extending out to sea for miles. Every ship that could do so gave the spot a wide berth, most of the coastal trade being carried on by junks from Singapore or Hatien. Any sign of smoke, therefore, could come from but one source—the *Trepang*.

Except for a smudge off to the west, however, in the direction of the Dama group, no smoke became visible. And with sunset, the peak of Tammassu was in sight to the north.

Brome wondered what the devil had become of his ship.

CHAPTER III

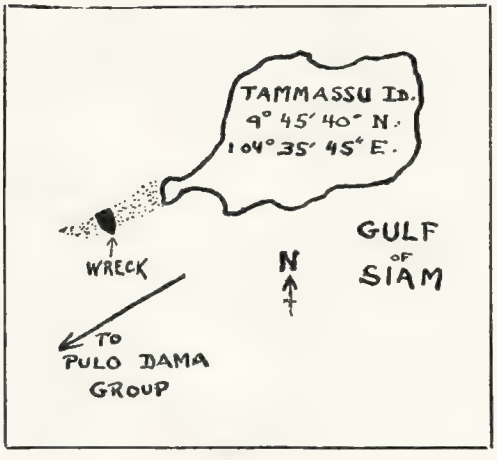
LONG before daybreak, Brome was astir and driving his leaky craft forward, under a light breeze from the east that sent him slipping through the water rapidly. Off to the northwest, in the direction that any ship would lie en route from Hatien, he descried the flashing of a light, before dawn. This he took to be a junk —whether or not *the* junk, remained to be seen. And, early in the night, he had picked up the sweeping beam of a searchlight off to the westward; this, together with the smudge he had seen, betokened that the *Trepang* must be over at the Pulo Dama group, sixteen miles from Tammassu. What she was doing there could only be conjectured, since the wreck was on Tammassu.

"Ten to one Bill Cochrane laid her ashore on one of the reefs there," cogitated Brome, as he held the whaleboat up for

the island. "That light to the nor'west is a junk bringing his gang from Hongchong or Hatien. It fits in. If that's the case, then Cochrane's job was to delay the *Trepang* or pile her up—and I'll wager he's done it! That'd mean his gang wins the race, and whoever gets to the wreck first can hold her against hell or high water. If I don't get under the island before that junk sights me, too, I'm a goner."

When the first gray dawn stole down, he was delighted to find that he had achieved his goal—had, in fact, almost over-reached himself. He wore around and bore up for the wreck.

Tammassu was a pear-shaped island four miles in length, a massive table of rock. Abrupt cliffs towered out of the water to a height of fourteen hundred feet, tapering down at the western tip to a long line of rocky reefs and ledges, whose fangs rose just above high water. This ledge, running out for seven hundred yards with a third of its length exposed, formed the stem of the pear, pointing to the southwest. Since Brome had run in to the eastward of the island before dawn, he was hidden from sight of the junk, which was approaching from the northwest.



The wreck of Sun Tock's silk junk lay within two hundred yards of the western point, just at the end of the exposed ledge. She had been flung on the ledge and dropped squarely athwart the narrow line of rocks, her bows to the south. A glance showed Brome that she had not been touched; the tangle of spars and rigging that littered her deck proved that not even a fisherman had set foot aboard her. For this, however, there was a good reason. From the broken foremast, bows and stern hung three strips of board upon which were painted Chinese ideographs—beyond a doubt, warnings or threats which had served to keep off any looters.

Working his way swiftly toward the wreck, Brome presently lowered mast and canvas and sculled with the oar in the stern. The whaleboat was a third filled with water, which quite suited his intent. Sharply surveying the wreck in the gradually increasing light, he perceived that she was deserted. Sun Tock had told him in Saigon that only one boat had reached shore from the wreck, and that no one else had survived.

"Talk about luck!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "I guess this is it, and no mistake. If I only had a rifle, now, I'd be all set for action! As it is, I'd better lie low and work the surprise racket."

NOW he came to the end of the higher rocks, with a hundred yards of barely exposed reef between him and the wreck. Half an hour later and he would have been lost—for, a couple of miles to the north and west, he perceived the dim shape of a junk standing down for the island. Those aboard her must be searching the wreck with glasses, and the ledge would not serve to hide the whaleboat from them in any clearer light. As it was, Brome had to take the chance of discovery. He shipped the oars and made shift to row the whaleboat, as this let him sit down and aided to keep his figure from sight. Presently he was under the bows of the wreck, and letting the oars go, caught a dangling line.

"Luck holds," said he, grinning.

A brief inspection of the wreck showed him a good deal. The cargo was undoubtedly worth fighting for, as the junk appeared to have been dropped bodily on the ledge by some giant wave and seemed unbroken in hull. If water had not reached the silk, it was all right. That she had not been heavily swept by seas was evident from the litter of matting sails and rigging which covered the bows in a great mass; otherwise, these would have been borne away.

Making the boat fast, Brome mounted to the bows of the wreck. Here the trailing mass of sails and rigging concealed him, and in another moment he let down a line and followed it. Making fast a breaker of water and what provisions he might need, he knocked out the plug from the bottom

of the whaleboat, mounted to the wreck, hauled up his supplies, and saw the whaleboat gently fill and drop from sight.

When she was hurled upon the ledge, the shock had carried away the spars and rigging of the junk and piled them up forward. Seeing that these were clear of the foredeck, Brome was safe enough in chancing any investigation of the mass piled over the bows. He placed his supplies in a tent-like niche, roofed over by trailing lines and sails, then cautiously worked his way aft until he could get a sight of what was happening.

SHE was now well within a mile of the wreck—a large coasting junk, two-masted, bearing down directly for the western point of the island. Brome lay quiet, studying her and wishing vainly for glasses. Two men stood together in her bows, whites and sun-helmets showing them to be white men; tiny pin-pricks of light, reflecting the radiant splendor of the sunrise, proved that they were examining the wreck through glasses, and Brome knew his precautions well justified. So far as he could detect, the crew of the junk were all natives, and he placed them at not above a score of men.

"Plenty to do the business, and to take care of me into the bargain!" he reflected, carefully getting farther from sight behind the tangle of cordage. "Two Frenchies running the show. Not the same two who were with Cochrane that night in the Reine Sadinet; they couldn't have gone over to Hatien. They aren't in the deal at all, evidently. These two are the prime movers. Bill Cochrane is in partnership with them. Hm! I'd certainly like to know what he's done to the *Trepang* and where she is!"

He considered the possibility of searching the wreck for a rifle, then discarded the idea as impracticable under the circumstances. He would certainly be discovered. So he withdrew to his niche and there devoted himself to making a hearty breakfast.

Regretfully deciding that it would be highly unsafe to smoke, he finished his meal and then worked his way back to the observation post. He was just in time to see the junk lay out her anchors, a hundred feet distant, at the edge of the shoal water. The heavy sails rattled down; firecrackers snapped; tin pans were banged; and the odor of joss incense sneaked down the wind as the devils were appeased; then two boats were lowered and started for the reef.

Brome lingered only to scrutinize the faces of the men. Both Caucasians were strangers to him; both were obviously French colonials—short men, swarthy, hairy of face, incredibly agile and alert. "Scorpions," said Brome to himself, and the comparison was apt enough; they were fighters, those two, and their sting would be deadly, as their rifles and pistols showed. The natives carried no firearms, and instead of being Chinese, they were brown Annamese—merry, laughing men afraid of nothing except devils.

"Stock going down fast," said Brome, and quietly withdrew to shelter of his niche under the wreckage. "Chinks wouldn't put up much of a fight; those little brown devils will fight to the last gasp and then some! Looks like I'd taken shelter in a hornets' nest and no mistake. Those two Frogs are bad 'uns, too. If I could collar one of 'em and get his rifle I might have a chance. Now's the ticklish moment—if they pass me up at the first search, I'm safe. They'll be getting at the cargo without any delay."

HE crawled into his nook and waited, pistol in hand. The two boats came alongside the stern of the wreck, which overhung the north side of the rocky ledge, and a chattering burst of excited voices told him that the visitors were aboard. The sun was by this time mounting the eastern sky.

Shrill cries, curt orders, thudding of bare brown feet on the decks, reached Brome. Presently the rending crash of axes at work, voices everywhere, the bang of hatches removed and hurled aside. Then came a space of silence; they were down below now, looking over the cargo for damage, undoubtedly, taking stock of things aboard. Brome lay quite motionless, pistol in hand, waiting. These Annamese were not seamen, though they might be able to manage the junk. They were, primarily, jungle men, river boatmen, hunters. Nor were these two white men sailors; they were land scum, captains of the underworld, agents of evil. All of them were to be the more feared on this account. The situation demanded, not seamanship, but sheer fighting ability.

"Even so," thought Brome, a bit more hopefully as he considered matters, "things

might be a lot worse. The *Trepang* will be along soon enough—soon as they get her off the shoal or repair the damage that Cochrane must have caused. Then there'll be an argument with these beggars, and in the middle of it I'll raise up and begin shooting. That ought to cinch matters."

This reflection consoled him. The two boats from the junk had brought nearly all her crew across. Even with twenty of the foe aboard, there would be at least that number from the *Trepang*. She would steam up close, he figured, and send all her force to attempt the wreck, and they would not halt for a shot or two. When the shooting began, an automatic pistol emptying into their backs would rout the Annamese in no time.

It was a very nice little scheme indeed, but it depended upon things which did not exist, and circumstances alter cases. For the moment, Brome had overlooked the obvious fact that Bill Cochrane was nobody's fool.

CHAPTER IV

ANOTHER half-hour passed by, but not in silence. The entire crew of the junk was now at work. Bales of silk, each of the usual eighty catties or a trifle over a hundred pounds in weight, were being broken out of the wreck's hold and the two boats were making trips to and from the junk. It was not fast work at all, since the boats could not carry large loads.

George Brome, lying *perdu,* could see nothing whatever, but his ears told him quite exactly what was going on, and he softly snorted in disgust.

"One'd think the blamed fools would speed up a bit! Why don't they rig a line from the junk and jerk over a batch at a time? At this rate they'll never get the cargo out of her. They'll get just enough aboard their old hooker so that we'll have to lay the *Trepang* alongside her and commit piracy to get it back! Wonder what's keeping the steamer anyhow? Should think her skipper would leave the engineers get her fixed up while he came over here with the boats—"

Amid the general clatter he had caught no sounds of booted heels near by, but suddenly a voice made him aware that the two Frenchmen were standing somewhere close at hand, probably just outside his shelter.

"They are in a hurry," said one.

"Like a *pousse-pousse* racing for a fare," was the response, and both men broke into laughter. The term was that ordinarily used to designate a rikisha.

"What the devil are they comparing to a rikisha?" thought Brome to himself. "Not the *Trepang,* certainly; they wouldn't take her approach so calmly."

"We should have half the silk out of this carrion-junk by dark," came the first voice. "What think you? Will the pigs work tonight?"

"They had better," came the curt response, and with reason. In the French East Indies the natives are not petted and pampered; quite the contrary. Color lines are more religiously respected than even in India; the French colonial is lazy, idle for lack of work, and has nothing better to do than to impose his will upon the natives. Therefore, he does it.

"For me, what paradise opens!" was the fervent exclamation. "Out of this cursed country at last, money to pay for everything, Marseilles awaiting me! It is too good to be true. You comprehend, I have a friend who lives in the Rue Bonnefoy—"

The other intervened with a coarse laugh.

"Monsieur the *président du conseil* has a Greek mistress; so new bureaus of administration are created and all the Marseilles Greeks come out to Indo China with soft jobs. Then they whine to get home again. And when M. Le Président tires of the fair Hellene—"

"Perhaps he turns to Bretagne, eh? And then all the Bretons find soft jobs—"

Both men laughed.

George Brome visualized the speakers—the Breton heavy-set, masterful, evidently the commanding genius, surly and sullen in aspect and manner; the Marseilles Greek dark and hairy, furtive, suspicious, readier to murder than to fight, immense mustaches giving him a falsely martial air.

"Shall you speak with them, or I?" asked the Greek.

"Leave them to me," said the Breton, with a rasping oath.

"And Cochrane?"

"He joins us."

BROME sat up suddenly at this. Cochrane! Something was going on out there—something that he must see! While the two men standing so close to him went on talking, he cautiously wormed his way

along through the tangle of cordage in the very bows of the junk, where a white shaft of blistering sunlight showed an opening in the mass.

Gaining this opening, Brome camouflaged his brown hair with a torn fragment of sail, and shoved his head up. One glance; then he swiftly fell to work getting the opening masked with cordage from the litter all around, so that he could lift his head and peer over the smashed bow-rail without being seen himself. This done, he settled himself comfortably and surveyed the situation with a low curse, eloquent of his own helplessness.

Standing on the mass of wreckage, directly above him and half turned away from him, were the two white men, rifle in arm. Hidden from him by the mass were the length of deck and the men at work—hidden, too, the anchored junk and plying boats. He could see, to the northeast, the precipitous mass of Tammassu towering in the sunlight; to the east, the empty sea, scarce marked by any ripple of breeze, blazing like molten glass in the rays of the hot sun, shimmering and refracting the heat back at the sky; and to the south the same molten expanse—broken by a moving shape.

So that was it! Brome cursed again, wearily, incredulously, as he peered out through the tangle and realized the truth.

"The damned fools!" he muttered under his breath. "Euchred themselves, and served the fools right! Too cursed slow in doing it, and then doing it by halves!"

EVEN without prismatics such as the two Frenchmen above him were using, he could clearly make out the whole story. A single boat was coming down the brazen sea, in her stern a white-clad figure, at her oars white men, naked to the waist. Old Sun Tock had been careful to ship only white men on the *Trepang*, save the coolies in the engine-room. With the exception of Brome, he had of course shipped Frenchmen as officers. And, as Brome now told himself, this was just what could have been expected of such officers.

That the boat had started out with the morning breeze, was made evident by the stepped mast forward. Now she was dependent on the oars, which were sending her through the water at a steady clip; Brome now understood why the Breton had likened her to a rikisha, and that Cochrane sat in her stern. Since he was making fools of the men who rowed him, the similarity to a white man in a coolie-drawn rikisha was not far-fetched.

BROME cursed again. He comprehended perfectly that the French skipper had delayed sending off men to make sure of the wreck, and that Cochrane had probably asked for the job. The other officers were no doubt glad enough to escape that sixteen-mile trip in an open boat under the hot sun.

"They're a day late doing it, the fools!" thought Brome. "Prob'ly Cochrane's responsible for that. Then they should ha' sent every man they had and left the engineers to get the ship off. Cochrane must ha' laid her up somewhere, blast him! Stock's going down fast. Looks now like it was a one-man job and no mistake. Still, Cochrane wont be fool enough to let that boat go back to the *Trepang*. If he collars those men, brings 'em aboard here and ties 'em up, I can reach 'em tonight; then there'll be ructions."

The boat was not coming on very fast, now, for those in her had of course sighted the junk, had made out figures aboard the wreck, and knew they were forestalled. Brome squinted at the oarsmen, and grinned savagely. What fools! They had worked themselves into a drip of sweat under the hot sun, then had stripped to the waist—or perhaps Cochrane had suggested it. What cursed fools! By next morning they would be groaning in agony or else dead. The Gulf of Siam is no place for a white man to show the sun his hide.

"Bill Cochrane is sure a murderous devil," reflected Brome with conviction.

The boat came on steadily, and after a bit she was hidden from his sight unless he desired to thrust his head out of shelter, which he did not. By the comparative silence now reigning aboard the wreck, he knew that the brown men had knocked off work and were waiting. The boat, then, was rounding the reef-point to reach her stern, and Brome cursed again upon finding that he would not see what happened. Presently, however, he was just as glad of it.

The silence was ominous; evidently Cochrane was coming straight aboard, for no hail was exchanged. To Brome the suspense grew heavy and intolerable, as he pictured the brown men waiting, the two white men waiting, grins on their faces. Then came a slight sound, as Cochrane's

boat jarred against those under the stern of the wreck. Almost at once, his voice sounded in English.

"The two after oars, follow me up. The rest of you stay in her. Leave your guns be."

ANOTHER silence, while Cochrane and his two men mounted the swinging ladder and gained the deck. Then the Breton extended Cochrane a laughing greeting, to which he made swift response.

"Cover those four men in the boat and disarm them. I'll attend to these two. Now, lads, hands up! Up, I say!"

A rush of feet, a swift chattering of voices in French, while Cochrane covered his two amazed men and the Frenchmen turned their rifles on the boat below. Then, from one of the two men with Cochrane, lifted a question, shrill with astonishment.

"What's this, sir? D'ye mean, Mr. Brome—"

Cochrane laughed harshly. "You fool, I'm not Brome! These are my partners; that's our junk yonder—keep your hands off those pistols or I'll drill you!"

Brome half rose, suppressed a groan, sank back.

A wild oath of dismayed comprehension rang out. Then the dull smack of a blow, a burst of shouts and shrill cries, the abrupt bark of a pistol. Brome's lips curled back from his teeth; with an effort, he conquered himself, though sweat poured on his cheeks. That man was an Englishman, obviously—

A thud of bare heels on the deck, more shouts, two shots in swift succession, and a choking scream in the air close by. Then a splash. From the after-deck, oaths and curses, the crash of a man's body falling, the short, vicious laugh of Bill Cochrane. The second man, then, was knocked out. But what of the first man? Brome cautiously raised himself, peeped out through the tangled cordage, and swore shamelessly under his breath. The first man was floating, a dozen feet away, a red smear dissipating in the water around him.

THAT was a stiff five minutes for Brome; had Cochrane and his pals been alone on the wreck, he would have gone for them, but thought of the Annamese held him back. Presently the sound of oars and laughing voices roused him, and once more he looked.

The boat from the *Trepang*, as he discerned through his camouflage, had rounded the wreck, crossing the sunken ledge just beyond her, and was now heading past her bows toward the point of land. Four Annamese were rowing; two others sat with pistols. The five white men from the *Trepang* were crowded into her bows, dazed, sullen, helpless, and one of them lay in a senseless huddle. The meaning of this was perfectly clear. They were being marooned.

All this was presently verified at first-hand. The three rascals came forward, no doubt to sit in the shade of the drooping wreckage from the foremast, and their voices reached Brome perfectly.

"A neat job all around." Cochrane was speaking in French. "I merely threw the compass out of true with a small magnet during my first watch at night. When I came on deck just before dawn she was on the Pulo Dama group, and it was no trick to let her smash on the first reef. She's lying there now. The captain is tearing out his hair regularly once an hour; everybody is giving advice; and she's trying her best to get off. It occurred to none of them to send the boats on, until I offered to come and take possession of the wreck. They did not suppose there was any great reason to make haste, of course, and did not suspect me—as you have seen."

The three laughed in unison.

"It goes well," said the Breton reflectively. "The silk is uninjured and safe. We shall have three boats at work, with the one you brought; by midnight the cargo will be safe aboard our junk. We cannot leave until dawn, however."

"Eh?" jerked out Cochrane. "Why not?"

"For the excellent reason, my friend, that we are not sailors, and our brown captain yonder is afraid to navigate between here and Hatien except by daylight, when he can see the half-hidden reefs and rocks. Last night I forced him to the task, nearly at the cost of a mutiny. When the junk is loaded down—"

For a moment, Brome's hopes rose at these words, only to be dashed by Cochrane.

"Bah! Leave it to me. I've been studying the charts and can take her in to Hatien with my eyes shut. You've arranged to dispose of the silk there?"

"The moment we enter port. No questions will be asked. The silk will be

transferred to the godowns of certain merchants without delay."

"You French officials certainly work in together," said Cochrane, and chuckled: "Well, it's getting on toward noon. When do we eat?"

"We have food and wine," said the Marseilles Greek. "Better stay here, my friend. It is cleaner than that other boat yonder. *Mon Dieu!* I never saw such cockroaches, and jumping spiders, and—"

"Never mind, I can guess the rest," broke in Cochrane. "Good enough. We'll camp out aboard here till we leave, tonight. Don't worry about the steamer. She wont get here until sometime tomorrow, even if she gets pumped out and lightened by high tide tonight. Those men ashore—going to give them any grub?"

"Let the dogs starve until the steamer comes," said the Breton callously. "They may find water, and can live on that for a day or two. Since the boat does not return, your friends on the steamer will think that you are holding this wreck for them, eh? Very nice all around, I call it. Very nice indeed!"

Brome, stretched out in his sun-sheltered niche, savagely chewed another cigarette. Very nice indeed!

CHAPTER V

THE afternoon had nearly worn its length away, and Brome, who was not of a very patient disposition at the best of times, was not in any amiable frame of mind, when in the glow of sunset, his peering eye caught a white spot floating on the flood tide. After a moment of scrutiny, he realized that it was the body of the murdered seaman. And at that, a sudden blaze of light came into his eyes.

"No sharks here!" he exclaimed softly. "Jumping catfish—what a stroke of luck!"

The sun sank from sight, its splendor still lingering on the craggy steeps of Tammassu long after its departure, and Brome made his very simple preparations, which consisted of abandoning tobacco, matches, pistol and all else that immersion might injure. As the darkness drew down, a flare was lighted aft on the wreck and his ears told him that work had been knocked off.

"All hands at chow, eh?" he muttered, removing his shoes. "I'll bet those boys ashore are hungry by this time, too—good thing! Make 'em fight. Well, here goes."

Having made fast a line to secure himself against any accident that might betray his movements, he quietly worked his way out of the tangle, got over the splintered rail, and lowered himself into the water beneath.

He struck out carefully, to avoid the sunken rocks beside the ledge, and getting into deeper water swung about for the point of land. A fire glimmered on the shore to guide him, and he made straight for it.

Presently he was crawling up the sand and approaching the fire, the five men grouped around it regarding him with amazement, suspicion, sullen scowls. Four of them were French. The fifth, whose bruised features showed that he was the second man who had followed Cochrane aboard the wreck, was an American, as his speech betrayed when he greeted Brome.

"Well, what sort of a duck are you, anyhow? Swum over here from China?"

"No, from the wreck," said Brome, and gave his name. He went on swiftly. "That swine Cochrane tried to murder me in Saigon and took my place aboard the steamer. I got a boat and sailed her around the coast and beat him here. I've been laying up on the wreck all day, and came ashore for a word with you boys."

The four Frenchmen chattered excitedly, but the American swore in lusty disbelief.

"You're a liar," he said flatly. "If you were there, and seen that devil do for my pal Billy Saunders—"

"Heard the whole thing," said Brome. "But I'm not trying any suicide, my lad. You can believe or not, as you choose. I've nothing to back up my words, but I'll back 'em up soon enough when I get into action. How many of you can swim?"

Three of the Frenchmen and the American, whose name was Jenkins, were swimmers. Brome wasted no time in arguments, but delivered his orders.

"Had anything to eat today? No? Then you'd better not pass up the chance I'm giving you. Along toward midnight, perhaps before then, I'll light a match in the bows of the wreck; you watch sharp for the flare. When you see it, the four of you who can swim, take to the water. If a shark doesn't get me, he wont get you. Head out for the junk, savvy? You,"—he turned to the fourth Frenchman,—"climb out along the ledge of rocks as far as you can go, and we'll pick you up. Don't fail, now!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Jenkins hoarsely. "Even if you are a liar, I'm with you! But that devil Brome, or whoever he was, who got poor Billy Saunders, is my meat!"

Brome's lips twisted in a grimace. "Not yet. He's mine. You're taking orders, Jenkins, and not giving them; mind that! We might just as well let those chaps load the junk up with the silk; then we'll take it away. Whether you believe me or not, you'd better not miss the chance. You watch for the light, too; it may come any time. Depends on what turns up."

HE turned back to the water. There was a sharp chorus of exclamations, questions, eager words; disregarding them entirely, Brome waded out, struck into the deeper water, and stroked his leisurely way back toward the wreck, whose flare on the after-deck guided him aright. Another flare, he perceived, as showing aboard the junk, and boats were now plying back and forth again.

"Don't blame 'em for thinking me a liar," and he chuckled softly, glancing over his shoulder at the excited men gathered over their fire. "They'll be along, right enough; that man Jenkins is just waiting until he can draw blood! If I wasn't so anxious to settle up with Bill Cochrane, I'd try to grab the junk now and get away —but I'm going to pay my debts too."

With this determination hard in him, he came "home" and by dint of careful work got back to his perch with scarcely a sound. Here, it must be admitted, an element of sheer luck favored him to the utmost, for scarcely had he got settled when he heard the voice of the Breton break out not far away, followed by a growl from Cochrane.

"You two can do a little work for a change. I've been at it all day and half last night, and now I'm going to sleep until you get loaded up. A couple of hours more will see the stuff broken out; then you can send most of the men over to the junk to help the four there do the stowing. Midnight will see us get off, sure! Run along and leave me alone, now."

Brome could hear the man fling himself down on the pile above and ease himself into a comfortable position, while the Breton, with many fervent imprecations, called the Marseilles Greek and they went aft together. That Cochrane was dead weary was quickly proved when a hearty snore began its steady reverberations.

A grim smile twitching at his lips, Brome began quietly clearing his niche of the overhead tangle, moved by a sudden audacious decision. He knew that the flare aft was so placed as to illumine the stern of the wreck, and left the bows well in darkness; thus, as he gradually emerged from his cranny and climbed the mass of wreckage, he was safe enough from discovery. So far as Cochrane was concerned, nothing short of an earthquake could have disturbed that gentleman.

Coming into full view of the proceedings, Brome discovered that the two Frenchmen were keeping the Annamese hard at work. Of these, he already knew that four were aboard the junk, throwing the silk into her hold as it was fetched aboard. Four more were aboard each of the three boats, and he calculated that half a dozen were at work in the hold of the wreck, breaking out the carefully stowed bales and passing up the discarded dunnage to be chucked overboard.

"Twenty-two in all, and three whites," he reflected. "They've all got pistols, and the frogs have rifles. Hm! If that was a steamer over there, I'd know what to do— blamed if I ever thought I'd come down to holding a ticket aboard a Chinese junk! But I guess we'll take a chance, anyhow. If that confounded French skipper would only bring up the *Trepang!*"

She was not to be sighted, however.

WORKING his way ahead very cautiously, Brome came to where Cochrane lay stretched out; he took out his pistol, paused, shook his head regretfully. He hated to do it, but there was no other way. The need was imperative, and aside from all private vengeance, Cochrane was the most dangerous of all the enemy. So, lifting the automatic, which had a ring set in the butt, Brome brought it down and did not spare the blow. Cochrane relaxed and lay silent, his snore dying away.

Now, dragging the limp figure by the collar, Brome retraced his course across the tangle of wreckage, regained his niche in the bows, dropped into it, and hauled his victim down. He explored Cochrane's pockets, found another pistol, felt under the shirt and regained with a grunt of satisfaction his precious little oilskin bag, and then cut with Cochrane's knife some light line from the cordage around. With this he firmly bound his captive wrist and ankle, then utilized cord and torn shirt to

make a gag which was uncomfortable but highly efficient, leaving only the victim's nostrils exposed.

"Danger be damned!" said Brome exultantly, and lighted a cigarette.

Sitting comfortably relaxed, he inhaled keenly and joyously for a few moments as he planned ahead, knowing that he could smoke safely. Cochrane he was resolved to take with him at any or all cost, and considered how best to do it. He rose, hauled his prisoner to a sitting posture, then searched until he obtained a splinter of smashed bulwark, two feet in length. This he lashed under and athwart the chin of his victim, and to each projecting side made fast the end of a lengthy line.

"You wont enjoy yourself, exactly," he reflected, and grinned. A sudden and convulsive movement of the bound figure apprised him that Cochrane was awake and conscious. He leaned forward and spoke, softly. "Don't know who I am, do you? You'll savvy plenty quick, Bill. I hope you don't go and drown yourself, because when I get more pressing business attended to, I'm going to cut you loose and lick you to a frazzle."

NOW Brome made his preparations, chuckling at thought of Cochrane's feelings upon discovering his captor's identity—here in the niche under the wreckage all was black. There was no use taking risks by waiting longer, he decided. Having warned the men ashore that he might not wait until midnight, it was up to them to keep watch.

He now had Cochrane's officer-cap to replace the nondescript headgear he had worn from Saigon. In this he now laid his two pistols, then got the cap on his head and its binding rim down over his skull. The result was calculated to keep the pistols dry, but Brome's head was still very tender, and he grimaced with pain.

"Can't be helped," he muttered, then groped for a match and prodded Cochrane. "Look alive, Bill! Believe in ghosts, do you?"

He struck the match, held it for an instant in front of his face, then cupped it in his hands so that the flare would be visible to those ashore. He laughed silently. The horrified gaze of Cochrane was fixed upon him in wild incredulity; those wide and staring eyes were frightful to see. Brome laughed again and pinched out the match.

"Recognize me, do you? Well, here goes to prove I'm no ghost, after all!"

With this he dragged Cochrane to the rail, shoved him over, lowered the inert form into the water. He himself followed, and seizing the tow-line whose ends were attached to the wooden float, slipped the bight over his head, and struck out. After making sure that the float was functioning and that Cochrane's nostrils were above water part of the time at least, he paid no further attention to his captive. It would be a bit of bad luck if the rascal drowned, but he could not well help it now. Fortunately, the water was calm.

In fact, all his care was strictly necessary to his own task, which was no simple one. He swam out to the end of the exposed ledge, then circled, giving it a wide berth. As he turned north, he could see the work going on; two boats going from the wreck to the junk, which had a flare on the deck-house amidships, and one boat returning to the wreck for a load of bales. He had to keep well out from the boats, circle the junk and approach her on the starboard side, as she was moored port side to the wreck.

"Luck's with me so far," he reflected. "I'll reach her while those two boats are sending up their silk and all hands are busy. With no seamen aboard her, chances are even that I'll find a dragging line; if not, I can get up by her stern mooring hawser. In that case, Bill Cochrane will go down while I go up—which can't be helped."

The Annamese in the boats and the junk were too weary and hard at work to pay any attention to phosphorescent stirrings in the water, even had these been observed. Brome was somewhat hampered by his load, but was gratified to find that Cochrane seemed to be towing fairly well; he made steady progress through the warm water, and the long, steady ground-swell caused him no trouble.

Presently he was past the junk, and circling down upon her starboard counter. Here Cochrane evinced his life and disposition by emitting a lusty snort through his nostrils, evidently with a desire to give warning or attract attention. He attracted Brome's earnest attention, coupled with a stiff jab in the face, which cured him instantly.

As he had half expected, Brome discovered a trailing line amidships of the junk. It was made fast above, so he first secured

it to Cochrane's lashing in such a manner as to hold the captive's head above water, then mounted and was over the rail. Finding himself in darkness and alone amidships of the craft, he hauled Cochrane up and then sat down to rest and consider his position.

"If you ask me," he grunted in keen satisfaction, "luck is sure playing my way this trip!"

CHAPTER VI

WANTING to get Cochrane out of the way, Brome investigated an opening in the deck-house before him. He was not at all familiar with the construction of junks, but his nose told him that this must be what passed for the forecastle. So, waiting only to ascertain that Cochrane was still alive, he dragged the bound figure to the opening and shoved. There came the sound of a fall, then a low groan, and Brome retired, satisfied that his prisoner was for the present quite secure.

He went into the bow and scrutinized the water carefully, but could detect no signs of any swimmers. The men should have been here by this time, if they were coming.

"Likely the blamed fools didn't see the flare," he decided. "Well, it aint my funeral! If they don't know a good thing when it hits 'em in the face, they can suffer and be durned. I started this as a one-man play and I guess I can put her through on the same lay."

Getting away with the junk itself did not worry him, but he could see no way of evading pursuit. If those two Frenchmen had even one boat, they could easily overhaul the slow-moving junk; his problem, therefore, was to secure both junk and boats, and he could see no possible way of solving it. The only alternative was to go ahead and trust to luck that he could fight off pursuit, and he decided to act on this course.

The flare on the junk's deck-house was so placed as to illumine her after deck and port side, leaving the starboard side in darkness. The majority of the silk must now be aboard, and as he dared wait no longer, he worked his way aft and reconnoitered the situation.

The forward hold, if there was one, appeared to have been filled with bales during the day, and from the way the silk was being sent down he calculated that the after hold was better than half filled now. The two boats had just finished sending their cargo aboard and were putting off. The third boat was starting from the wreck. Two of the four Annamese aboard were tossing the bales haphazard into the hold, and when the last had gone down, they followed nimbly.

"Now's the time to grab 'em off," thought Brome, pistol in either hand. "I've got four or five minutes before that other boat comes alongside, and a lot can happen in that length of time. If Jenkins and his men had come aboard, it'd be a cinch—as it is, here goes for luck!"

Since the after deck was all in light, he gained the port bulwarks, stooped low to shelter himself as much as possible from the sight of those aboard the wreck, and made a dash for the open hatchway. He gained it with a rush, threw himself flat, head and shoulders over the coaming, and looked down at the four men beneath him, who were working by the light of a swinging lantern.

THE four brown men had heard Brome drop, and were staring upward. They were stripped to breech-clouts, and were unarmed. They gazed stupidly at the two pistols covering them.

"Any of you speak French?" he demanded, and all nodded. "The first one of you that opens his mouth to speak or yell, will be shot. You with the red sarong! Come and get this rope and tie up your friends as I tell you. Not a yell, or you die!"

A line was dangling loosely down the hatchway. The man indicated came to it and submissively obeyed the directions which Brome snapped at him. All four of them were cowed and frightened—was he not a white man, one to be obeyed? Besides, the pistols made a potent argument.

Three of the men were tied upon the same length of line when Brome, gathering himself together, dropped lightly upon the silk bales six feet below. He himself bound the fourth man, then, not trusting altogether to the pistol-threat, stripped off his own wet shirt and ripped it up, improvising gags. When the four were in the shape he wanted them, he marched them back out of the lantern light.

"Be good boys, and I'll not hurt you," he said. "Make any noise, and I'll kill you."

So far, so good—but there was no time to spare. Already he could hear the boat scraping alongside, and an angry voice that startled him. It was the voice of the Breton, shouting to the Annamese to pass down a sling for the bales in the boat.

Brome stepped to the lantern, turned down the wick so that the light was dim, and then crouched, beyond the rim of light. The call was repeated; then came angry imprecations and a thud of feet on the deck above. The Breton looked down into the hold and shouted at the invisible men, then, with a furious oath, dropped to the bales.

He turned to look into Brome's pistol.

"Hands up! Quick, you devil—"

THE Breton, staring as though at a ghost, lifted his arms—and Brome whipped over a left, squarely to the jaw. The unfortunate man never knew what hit him, but shot backward limp and senseless. Brome was upon him in a flash, extracted his pistol, then lifted his voice in an imitation of the Breton's gruff tones.

"Come down here, all of you!"

He could hear their feet on the deck, and knew his only chance now was to make sure of all four men from the boat before they wakened to the situation. They gathered about the hatchway and jumped down, one after another. None were armed, the men aboard the wreck evidently having all the weapons.

Brome smiled at them grimly over his pistol. Little he cared now if they made any outcry! They made none, however, but gaped at him in dull bewilderment, and without the least protest one of them obeyed his commands and began to tie up the other three.

When the three men were bound, Brome tied up the fourth and then turned his attention to the prostrate Breton. While not bothering to gag these men, he did gag the Breton and bound him firmly. Looting some cigarettes from his pockets, he sat down and enjoyed one, while he reflected on the situation.

He could do nothing better, he decided regretfully, than slip the cables and depart. As to the Marseilles Greek and the Annamese on the wreck, that problem had very likely solved itself, for the Breton must have brought his rifle with him.

"It's probably down there in the boat now," thought Brome. "Those chaps on the wreck are armed with the pistols off the *Trepang* men, and the Greek has a rifle. Having three pistols of my own, and most likely a rifle, I can stand 'em off proper. The first thing is to collar that rifle, then let go the cables. Whether they see me or not, wont matter—before they realize what's up, we'll be on our way. Get going, Mister, get going! If Jenkins and those Frenchies had only come—but they haven't, so no use sobbing."

He rose and climbed to the deck above.

Glancing about, Brome saw that the flare on the deck-house was beginning to burn down, which exactly suited his purpose. From somewhere close at hand his nostrils detected the sweetish reek of opium, and he grinned as he sniffed it. These Annamese, left behind, would certainly miss their accustomed pill! It never came into his head to connect the odor with any thought of danger.

He made his way aft, hoping against hope for some sign from Jenkins and the four Frenchmen, and finding none; searching the water for telltale phosphorescent flashes, he found none, and swore softly as he turned away.

"Their own fault—they've had plenty of time! Now for the rifle."

NAKED to the waist, pistol in his hip pocket, the other pistols on the deck forward, he returned and went straight to the ladder. No matter now whether he were seen or not! Once he had that rifle in his hands, once he held those two other boats under its muzzle, he was safe. Then to cut the cables, and away, letting his prisoners go in the boats with two oars each.

It was a good plan. Exultation thrilled in him as he went over the side and ran down the ladder. A glance showed him that the two boats were just setting off from the wreck with their loads. He dropped into the boat, still heavy with her piled silk-bales, and began to search for the rifle.

To his disappointment and dismay, he found himself balked of his desire. No rifle was in the boat; whatever the cause, the Breton had crossed to the junk leaving his rifle behind! Brome delayed, feverishly searching under the bales, under the thwarts, everywhere, only to realize that he had cheated himself. A curse broke from him. Pistols, then, would have to do it—

He swung up to the ladder, with the two

boats halfway to the junk, and hauled himself upward. The flare above was now flickering for lack of fuel, and he cursed again at that; everything seemed going wrong at once, for he needed enough light that the men in the boats might see him plainly. He had first figured on letting the flare go out. Perhaps too much success had affected his luck, he thought.

He reached the rail, swung himself over. As his feet touched the deck, a dark shape uprose to one side, he heard the laugh of Bill Cochrane, and a fist smashed him back head-first into the bulwark.

CAUGHT unawares, half stunned by the blow, Brome lost whatever chance he might have had of putting up a fight. Clutching the rail to keep himself on his feet, he was sent sprawling by a staggering kick that left him sick and paralyzed; then Cochrane was on top of him with fist and boot.

"Goin' to cut me loose and lick me, are ye?" he panted as he struck. "I'll show ye who gets the lickin' this trip, Mister! I'll show ye!"

Brome could no more than drag himself to his knees, after that one deadly kick. In the dying light of the flare he beheld a native dancing about gleefully, waving an opium pipe—then a boot crashed into his ribs and doubled him up in agony. Cochrane stooped, hauled him upright with one hand, and with the other put in jab after jab to the face in a ferocious and brutal lust for blood, until his unresisting victim went limp. Then he dropped Brome to the deck, and turned about.

"Give me that pipe—I'll smash his head in!"

He reached out for the long pipe of bamboo with heavy earthenware bowl that the brown man was waving—but the Annamese fully comprehended that his treasure would be smashed to flinders, and ran into the darkness. Cochrane cursed, and sprang to the rail as the two boats came under the ladder, and began to speak rapidly to the crews.

Brome steadied his swimming senses, fought down the nausea that swirled up from his hurt stomach, lay quiet. He was a mass of bruises; blood was hot on his face and neck—indeed, for a little he was unable to stir a muscle. Yet, underneath all this, he was furiously angry, despairing, desperate. His own helplessness maddened him.

Everything was a blur before his eyes, until he heard Cochrane ordering the men in the boats to come up. Now he remembered the pistol in his pocket, and moved his arm. Pain shot through him, and he knew that a rib must be broken, but his hand feebly obeyed his brain, crawled to his hip pocket, got the pistol out. He shoved it underneath his body and lay quiet.

Light seeped into his eyes—the Annamese who had been down in the deck-house smoking opium, the brown man who had undoubtedly released Cochrane, was piling fuel on the flare. Things cleared before Brome. He saw Cochrane turning from the rail toward him, just as the first man came up from the boats below.

"Now or never!" The thought bubbled up in his brain. "Now's the time—another minute and it'll be too late—"

He dragged himself to one knee, caught the bulwark beside him, leaned his shoulder against it as his head reeled. Cochrane saw the motion and started forward at him, with a wide grin. The grin vanished suddenly as Brome's hand lifted. An oath, and Cochrane flung himself to one side, ducked across the deck, took shelter behind the foremast. Brome fired, and the bullet went wild.

A BROWN man was running at him, knife out, others pouring up over the rail. Brome's sight cleared, and he shot the first man down. Cochrane was shouting at them. Like their fellows, they were unarmed save for knives—the firearms were with the men on the wreck. Steel flashed in the ruddy light; they piled for Brome—and he began to shoot steadily. One man—two—three—and that broke them. He looked for Cochrane as they ran, and fired again and again at the figure by the mast—

The clip of cartridges was exhausted.

Brome knew it; Cochrane knew it, yelled at the Annamese. They circled, crept forward, knives out, wild eyes fastened upon him. From the wreck came a chorus of yells and shouts. Brome tried to get across the deck to where the other pistols lay, but his legs refused to move. He pulled himself up, hurled the empty pistol at the brown men as they closed in, then let himself fall forward and drove his fist into the foremost brown face as he went down.

A wild yell shrilled up as they closed on him.

CHAPTER VII

JUST what happened was not, at first, apparent to Brome. He had a queer vision of Cochrane falling forward with a naked shape clamped Caliban-wise over his shoulders; then he was down under the mass of brown men, struggling and striking to avoid the knives. The next instant it seemed that the group of Annamese was struck by a small cyclone which brushed them away, knocked them right and left, and began to hurl them overboard.

Brome found himself alone, unhampered. He dragged himself to one knee, wiped the blood from his eyes, and stared. He saw four naked Frenchmen finishing the job of throwing the brown men overboard, while on the deck before him rolled Cochrane in the grip of an equally naked Jenkins. The latter, with a whoop of exultation, got Cochrane under him, seized his hair, and began to bang his face into the deck with terrific force.

"Ye damned murderer!" cried Jenkins shrilly. "Take that for Billy Saunders—"

"Stop it, stop it!" gasped out Brome. "Don't kill him—yet!"

Jenkins examined his victim, found Cochrane senseless, and obeyed the behest. The four French seamen, grinning and shouting tumultuously, gathered about Brome, and Jenkins joined them as they pulled Brome to his feet.

"Thought we'd never get here, sir," he said. "Jacques, this feller who couldn't swim, wouldn't be left behind, so we made a float to bring him along—"

Something whistled overhead, and from the wreck came the crack of a rifle.

"Douse that flare!" ordered Brome sharply. "Jenkins, you'll find a couple of pistols on the deck near the hatch. Go below and bring up all the men you find there. Two of you men slip down into the boats alongside and bring up all the oars except one to a boat. Haul one boat aft to the stern and bring her up—you'll find davits there with the falls down."

The men hurried to obey. When the flare died away, there was nothing to show what was going on, and no further shots came from the wreck, although the Marseilles Greek was yelling furious queries across the water. Jenkins got the unhappy Breton up from below, with the brown men, and kicked them over into the two boats, while the third was being hauled up aft. The Breton was dazed, pleading, whining, uncomprehending. Brome laughed down at him—the laugh was weak, yet it was a laugh.

"Go ashore and enjoy life, M. le Breton! I hope you like the cuisine. Adieu!"

BROME lifted his voice to the men. They began to slip the cables, to hoist the square slatted sails.

"Jenkins! Know anything about setting a broken rib?"

"I have helped at it, sir—"

"Then come and get busy."

Jenkins obeyed, called one of the men, worked over Brome for a moment.

"Don't think it's broken, sir. Cracked, maybe. Gosh, you sure are stove in! What about this feller who called himself Brome? Want me to hang him yet?"

"Tie him up," said Brome. "He's not to be hung."

"What?" exclaimed Jenkins. "After him murdering Billy Saunders!"

"He's going to New Caledonia when we get to Saigon. Before we get there, I'm going to cut him loose and show him what a fight means. Mr. Jenkins! You'll be acting mate this voyage. Lay the course due south. Get that hatch clapped on. Fetch up that lantern."

Into the night was slipping the flare aboard the wreck, with its medley of shouts and high voices, as the junk gathered way and heeled over to the breeze. Jenkins came to Brome and touched his forelock in salute.

"Thank'ee, sir. But, sir, south aint the course. The *Trepang* is due west-sou'-west of us, on them rocks—"

Brome laughed suddenly.

"Damn the *Trepang!* I sailed a whaleboat here from Saigon alone, and I reckon I can take this hooker back with you lads to help. Think I'm going to split the reward money with a bunch of blamed fools who can't run a steamer up the coast? Damn the *Trepang!* Lay the course due south and pray for luck!"

"Aye, sir—due south it is," said Jenkins. "But as for luck—luck be cursed! We got you, and I guess that's all the luck we need. Luck's what you make it."

"Luck's what you make it," repeated Brome reflectively, and rubbed his bristly chin.

THE END

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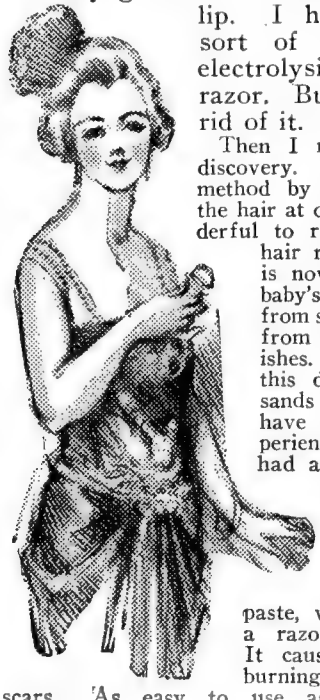

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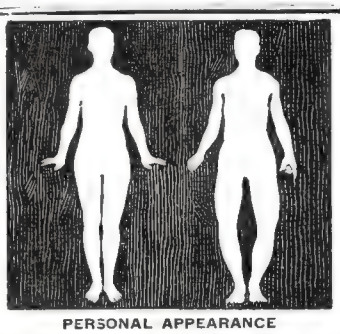

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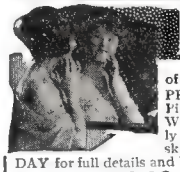

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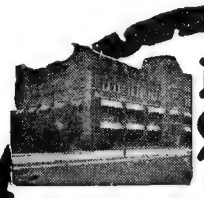

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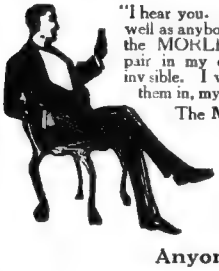

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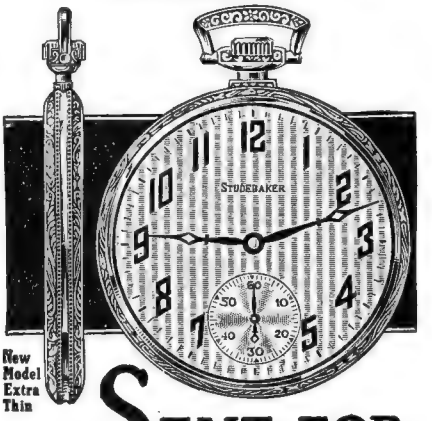

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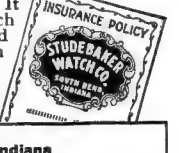

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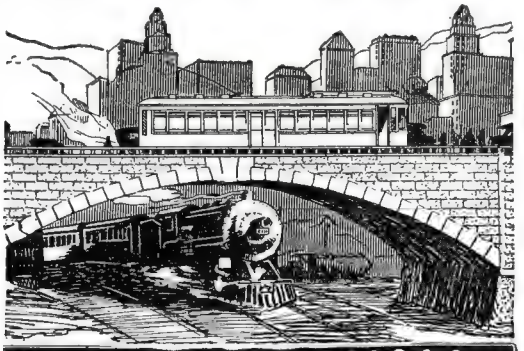

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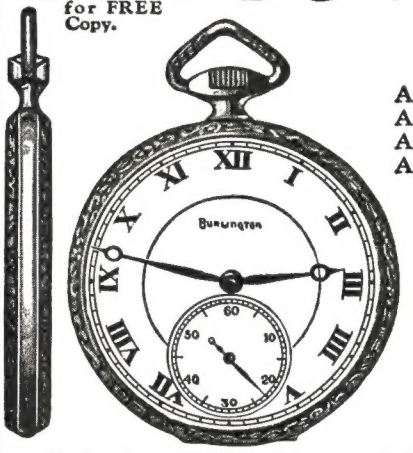

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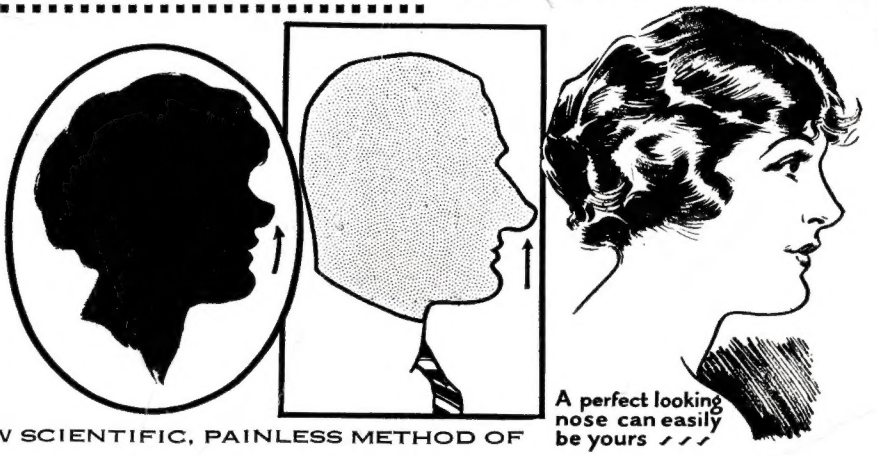

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CORRECTING ILL-SHAPED NOSES AT HOME

TIME ADVANCES—as does science succeed in perfecting each invention. My 15 years of experience in manufacturing and selling Nose Shapers have proven to me that I can now offer to the unfortunate possessors of ill-shapen noses the most meritorious Nose Adjuster of the age. My latest improved Model No. 25 (U. S. and many foreign patents) has so many superior qualities that it surpasses all of my previous shapers and other Nose Adjusters by a large margin.

In the first place, my newest appliance is better fitting; the adjustments are such that it will fit every nose without exception—my apparatus is constructed of light weight metal, and is afforded very accurate regulation by means of six hexagonal screws, which are regulated with a key and the screws are then locked in the desired position. These screws will bring about the exact pressure for *Correcting the various nasal deformities*—such as: long—pointed nose—pug—hook or shrew nose—and turned up nose—and will give marked success in modulating the distended or wide nostrils. There are no straps to be pulled in order to exert pressure on the nasal organ.

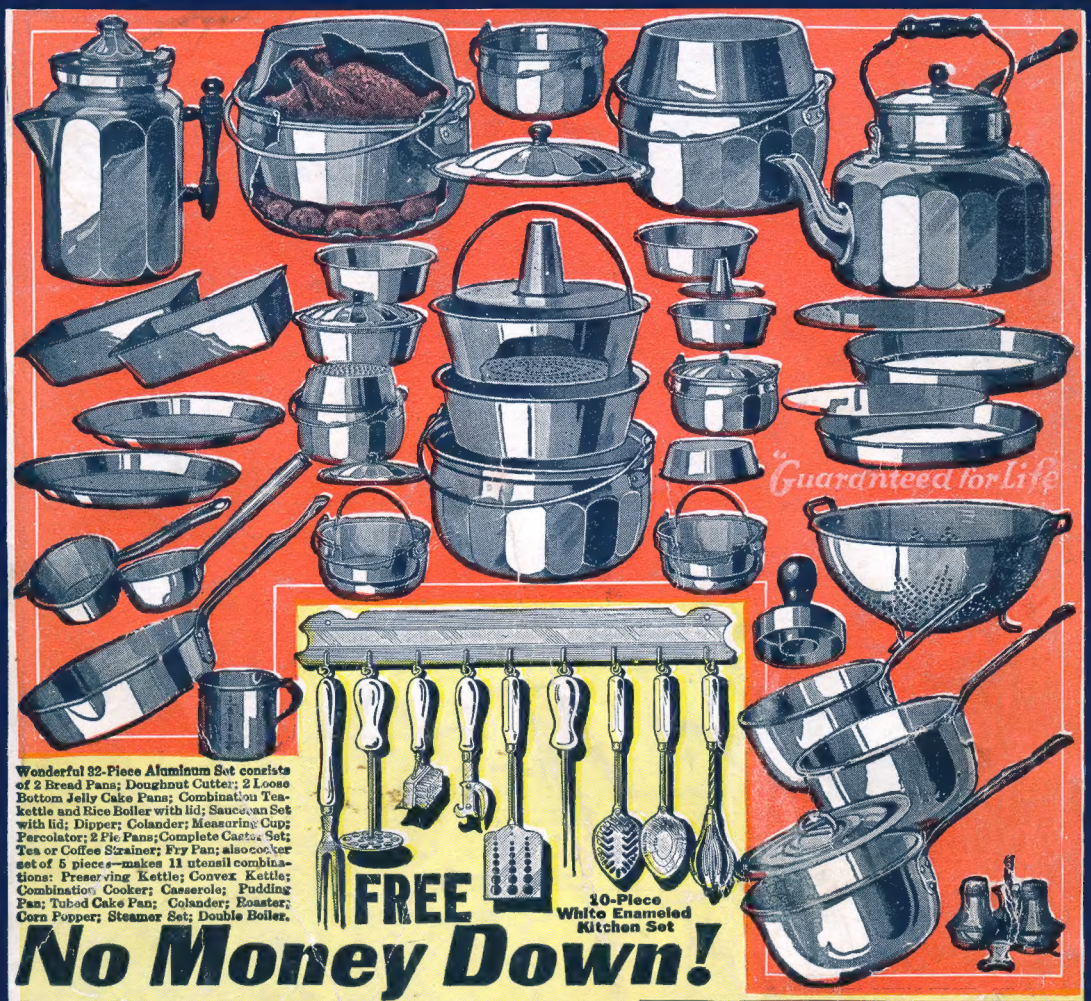
Model No. 25 is upholstered inside with a very fine chamois (covering a layer of thin metal) which protects the nose from direct contact with the apparatus; this lining of metal causes an even, moderate pressure on the parts being corrected, thus avoiding a harsh, violent pressure in any one place.

Model No. 25 is guaranteed, and *corrects now all ill-shaped noses without operation*, quickly, safely, comfortably and permanently. It is to be worn at night and, therefore, will not interfere with your daily work.

If you wish to have a perfect looking nose, write today for my free booklet which tells you how to correct ill-shaped noses without cost if not satisfactory.

M. TRILETY, Face Specialist

1923 Ackerman Bldg., Binghamton, N. Y.



Wonderful 32-Piece Aluminum Set consists of 2 Bread Pans; Doughnut Cutter; 2 Loose Bottom Jelly Cake Pans; Combination Teakettle and Rice Boiler with lid; Saucepan Set with lid; Dipper; Colander; Measuring Cup; Percolator; 2 Pie Pans; Complete Castor Set; Tea or Coffee Strainer; Fry Pan; also cooker set of 5 pieces—makes 11 utensil combinations: Preserving Kettle; Convex Kettle; Combination Cooker; Casserole; Pudding Pan; Tubed Cake Pan; Colander; Roaster; Corn Popper; Steamer Set; Double Boiler.

FREE 10-Piece White Enameled Kitchen Set

No Money Down!

Just mail the coupon and we send this 32-Piece Aluminum Cooking Set, and the 10-Piece Kitchen Set Free. When the goods arrive, pay only $2.00 and small postage charges on the Aluminum Set. Nothing for the Kitchen Set—it is FREE. Use both sets *30 days on Free Trial* and if not satisfied send them back and we will refund your money and pay transportation both ways. If you keep them, pay for Aluminum Set, only a little every month.

FREE 10-Piece Kitchen Set

Not a penny to pay for this set. You get it absolutely free with Aluminum Set.

Potato Masher
Mixing Spoon
Measuring Spoon
Ice Pick
Egg and Cream Beater
Can Opener
Vegetable & Pan Brush
Fork
Egg and Cake Turner
Wall Rack

All have white enameled handles and hang on wall rack—keeping them conveniently at hand.

Complete 32-Piece Aluminum Set and FREE Kitchen Set

Hartman's special, selected set of heavy gauge Aluminum Ware—a complete cooking outfit, light to handle, easy to clean, always bright as silver. Will never chip, crack or rust. We guarantee it for life. 32 utensils—everything for baking, boiling, roasting, frying. And—absolutely free—a Combination Kitchen Set, 10 utensils with pretty white handles.

Nearly a Year to Pay

You pay only $2.00 and postage on arrival (on the Aluminum Set—not a penny to pay at any time on the Kitchen Set). The balance a little every month.

Order by No. 417EEMA7. Price for Aluminum Set, $18.95. No money down. $2 and postage on arrival. Balance $2 monthly. 10-Pc. Kitchen Set is Free.

HARTMAN Furniture & Carpet Co.

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HARTMAN FURNITURE & CARPET CO. Dept. 5605 Chicago, Ill.

Send the **32-Piece Aluminum Cooking Set No. 417EEMA7, Price $18.95,** and 10-Piece Kitchen Set. Will pay $2 and postage on the Aluminum Set on arrival. Kitchen Set is FREE. I am to have 30 days' free trial. If not satisfied, I will ship both sets back. If I keep them, I will pay you $2 monthly until the price of the Aluminum Set, $18.95, is paid. Title remains with you until final payment is made.

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or Street and No.....

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